MEMORANDUM

TO: Rev. Gil Lincoln
Rev. Joseph Gilbert
Rev. Stan Harris
Rev. Bob Darst
Rev. John Gill
Rev. Delores Berry
From: Rev. Marge Ragona

Date: October 1, 1979

Re: Christian Education Programs
Advent Meditations, etc.

I am enclosing herewith a 4 part Advent series, which is based on a small book, The Prison Meditations of Father Delp.

Last year we used these at Providence, and the group which took part found them enormously useful. I do not know if this material is of value to you, but thought you might like to have a look at it and give it a try. Very often we are looking for something a little more "grown up" than the usual printed material for laity sent out by the denominations.

We are trying a Christian Education series now at the L.A. church which centers around 3 classes and a rap series. When one of the classes ends just before Advent, we hope to slip in this series, and then begin new classes in January.

I have enclosed our little flyer -- all of them tried and tested materials and courses. (As some of you will recognize from things I have done in the past.) We have used Michael England's material for Homosexuality and the Bible, the Allbright and Mann Book of the Acts of God as our base for the Old Testament Course, and Rosiland Rinker's materials for the Prayer group. All three have received excellent reviews from our people. Rev. England's original material carried a teacher's guide, the new material does not. You might contact him for the original guide. Beulahland Press (MCC-Washington, D.C.) provides the student texts for the Homosexuality and the Bible. The chapter on Homosexuality in James Nelson's Embodiment, Ralph Blair's An Evangelical Look at Homosexuality and the Bible and Rev. Robert Arthur's booklet Homosexuality and the Bible were recommended reading for the teacher for the course, who is a layman. The teacher's guide for the Prayer course is Rosiland Rinker's Conversational Prayer: Talking with God and the student's book is Prayer, Conversing with God. The Allbright and Mann book is available through most religious book outlets including Cokesbury. Any of these could be repeated with lay leaders facilitating them, or with them being taught by yourself. I think they are a wonderful way of involving good lay people -- and help to rid churches of the philosophy that the only way to be involved is by becoming a deacon, exhorter or board member.

Your prison ministry people might also like to take a look at the Advent materials for use with prisoners. You are free to xerox at will -- the book is out of print!

I have taken the liberty of making the language inclusive -- so you need not worry on that score. I hope it reads well, also.

I know it is early to think about Advent and Christmas -- but maybe it isn't -- it's only about 8 weeks away. Have a blessed Advent and Christmas.

Marge

24 February 1982

Rev. Marge Ragona
c/o MCC Boston

131 Cambridge
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Marge;

I appreciated the offering that you sent me to help me with my trip back east. I spent 5 days in the Oversea Ministry Study Center. Here we were having conferences twice a day and sometimes in the evenings too. They were very interesting and eye opening. I made a lot of contact with people that may be of help for the Hispanic Americas.

I also inagurated the newest study group in the H.A.M. It is called " Iglesia de la Comunidad Metropolitana Maranatha". I have a board meeting with the board of director of ICM Hispana and I got a two weeks vacation for its interim pastor, Rev. Parets.

So my trip was worthwhile. I praise God that I was able to go.

Marge I don't know what happends but I got your check back. Here enclosed you will find it. It says to be return because of insufficient fund. I know that there must be a mistake. Will you please check it out. Thanks.

May God Bless you and keep you always helping to reach the Hispanic People of the Americas. Give my love to Sheila and to Missy.

Your co-worker in the Field

José

the Rev. José L. Mojica

MAY 26 1981

May 13, 1981

Rev. L. Robert Arthur, District Coordinator
P.O.Box 65206
Los Angeles, CA 90065

Dear Bob,

My spouse, Kathy Tinker, and I are interested in moving to your area. I will be licensed this month at the Mid-Central District Conference. If you will remember, I was in your seminar on Prison Ministry at the Kansas City conference last fall.

Enclosed you will find our resumes. We see ourselves residing in one place for at least five years. We want a permanent residence where we can grow and help others grow in the glory and knowledge of God as revealed through Jesus Christ. We would bring with us experience and knowledge and hope that our combined efforts with the church would enhance God's work in the whole community (straight and gay).

Please feel free to contact Rev. Reid Christensen for a reference. If you need other references, please let me know.

I would appreciate your distributing our resumes to any appropriate churches, according to your discretion.

We hope to hear from you soon.

May God be with you in your work.

Yours in Christ,

Candy

Rev. Candace Adams
421 Vermont #3
Quincy, IL 62301

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CANDACE ADAMS
421 Vermont, Apt.#3
Quincy, Illinois 62301
(217) 224-9860

CAREER OBJECTIVE: To obtain a position in full-time ministry where I can utilize my experience and abilities.

EDUCATION:

Bethany College
Bethany, West Virginia
Bachelor of Arts, 1969
Major: Religion Minor: Music

Yale Divinity School
New Haven, Connecticut
Master of Divinity, 1972
Major: Pastoral Counseling
Practicum: Clinical Pastoral Education, Yale-New Haven Hospital

Ordained: May 21, 1972, Christian Church(Disciples of Christ)

WORK EXPERIENCE:

Metropolitan Community Church - Illiamo
802½ Maine
Quincy, IL 62301
Title: Exhorter
Responsibilities: Assisting Rev. Reid Christensen during Sunday Services including preaching once a month; Choir accompanist and pianist for services when needed; Preaching at one of the new study groups (MCC Quad Cities or MCC Springfield) once a month; Sharing in Bible Study leadership; Counseling; Creating a Christian Education program for children in the church. August 1980 to present.

Two Rivers Regional Council of Public Officials
Adams County Board CETA Office
Franklin Square, State and Gardner Expressway
Quincy, IL 62301
Title: Counselor II
Responsibilities: Individual Intake and Assessment, In-depth Counseling, Equal Employment Opportunity Officer for CETA participants, computerized records keeping. September,1980 to present.

Metropolitan Community Church - Knoxville
P.O.Box 2343
Knoxville, TN 37901
Title: Worship Coordinator, Exhorter out of MCC Nashville under the Rev. Gilbert Lincoln
Responsibilities: All pastoral duties including preaching, counseling, and administration; organizer of the following: Gay Pride Week (1978m 1979); an alternate worship service when Anita Bryant preached at First Baptist Church in Alcoa, TN.; speaker on a panel for a workshop on Homosexuality and Substance Abuse; speaker on TV and Radio, University of Tennessee classes and for organizations such as the National Organization for Women. June 1978 to July 1980.

WORK EXPERIENCE (continued)

Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee
CETA Office
2918 Magnolia
Knoxville, TN 37914
Title:Counselor II
Responsibilities: Provide in depth counseling for GED participants, supportive services person and records keeping. July, 1977 to August, 1979.

Women's Services of Knoxville, Inc.
Knoxville, TN 37901
Title: Director
Responsibilities: Administration of 24-hour Counseling and Referral Service, conference and workshop planning, public relations with various media. January, 1976 to January, 1979.

Volunteer Medical Clinic
Knoxville, TN
Title: Counselor (part-time)
Responsibilities: Family planning counseling, assisted physicians and public relations. June, 1975 to June, 1977.

First Christian Church
Knoxville, TN
Title: Associate Minister
Responsibilities: Administered Christian Education Program, Youth Program, some preaching and public speaking. January, 1973 to August, 1974.

ACHIEVEMENTS: Selected by State of Tennessee International Women's Year Conference as one of 20 delegates to the National I.W.Y. Conference, Houston, Texas, 1977.

REFERENCES: Furnished upon request.

KATHY S. TINKER

421 Vermont, Apt.#3
Quincy, IL 62301
(217)224-9860

Date of Birth: 2-6-53
Height: 5'4"
Weight: 125
Health: Excellant

CAREER OBJECTIVE:

To obtain a position where I can use my experience and abilities.

WORK EXPERIENCE:

Factory: Manpower Temporary Services, Inc., Quincy, IL
Boise Cascade Can Group, Orlando, FLA
Jim Robbins Seatbelt, Knoxville, TN
Assembly, Quality Control, Inspection.
Three and one half years.

Produce: McMahan Produce Co., Knoxville, TN
Maryville Produce Co., Maryville, TN
Production laborer handling and inspecting fruit and vegetables.
Three years.

Landscaping-Maintenance:
Knoxville Zoological Society, Knoxville, TN
Planted and kept up lawns, gardens and indoor plants; helped lay sod, drove dump truck to haul gravel and dirt; helped lay asphalt; helped build patios out of brick; carpenter helper.
One year.

Driver: Big Orange Cab Co., Knoxville, TN
Pick up and deliver persons; deliver for Western Union cash and mailgrams; Managed own money.
One year.

EDUCATION: Oliver Springs High School
Oliver Springs, Tennessee
Diploma

SPECIALIZED TRAINING: Auto mechanics - 1 year
Heavy Equipment mechanics - 6 weeks
Upholstery - 5 months

REFERENCES: FURNISHED UPON REQUEST.

ADVENT MEDITATIONS

The Third Week of Advent

OPENING PRAYER

The People Who Are Not at the Crib - Even those who are not there have a message for us and a judgment to give if only to make us realize what it is that keeps usseparated from God. After all, as a people today we are not at the crib either. Yet the emotions aroused by much that we are living through ought certainly to make us want to be there.

Those who were not there include the powerful, the wealthy and the learned leaders of the synogogue -- that is, the powerful heads of the established church.
Matthew 2:16-23

The Powerful - Neither the Roman procurator nor the recognized native rulers made their appearance at the crib to receive ratification of their power. Power can only be genuine and good when it is rooted in the divine. These people possessed power in their own right and used it only to further their own ends. Theirs is the mystery of power. Those who possess power have the implicit duty -- and the opportunity -- to serve as God's deputies. The French, more realistic than we, have two different words, force and puissance (power/strength,power over vs. power to) Puissance conveys the awe inspiring impression of inner power. Power in itself and as the sum total of all the means of enforcing it becomes destructive in the hands of arrogant totalitarian authority and ruins both the one who wields it and the subjects on whom it is exercised. The tyrant in possession of such power is no longer capable of spiritual sensitivity. Tyrants are suspicious of everything that does not fit into the narrow limits of permitted and regulated expression. There was no paragraph in the rules at Jerusalem covering the birth of the child at Bethlehem. Hence the reaction of perplexity and fear and the prompt recourse to the sword. In circumstances like these the subject beings grow timid and cowardly; they accept that their claim to life is cut to the basic minimum of official permission.

Dare we ignore this message and judgment? The history of power in the Western world is onelong story of ruthless force. There is no room in it for the glory of God which is neither safeguarded nor respected. The great are concerned only with their own importance and spend their lives jockeying for position. And the consequences, as far as they concern humanity as a whole are only too obvious. Fear has become a cardinal virtue. This is not said in a spirit of anarchy. But power must regain its proper dimension, allying itself with eternal purpose and genuine mission. Otherwise it will merely evoke counter-action and the ghastly struggle for survival will never end. And as subordinate beings humans must waken to the inherent sovereignty of their spirits, believing in conscience and their relationships with God.

Meditation/Discussion: How does "power over" control you life and keep you from being what God wants you to be?

Reading: Luke 4:18-19

The Wealthy - There is nothing wrong in having great possessions. But when our possessions rob us of our freedom and make us slaves then they become evil. It was like this at the time of the Nativity, and the palaces and fine houses were not destined to shelter the Lord. Great possessions can and should be a blessing. But the owners of treasure are also people who are afraid of any order of things not

covered by the official records. It is so now and it was so then -- Our Lord's words on the subject are well known.

A great many hasty judgments have been made in this connection and much prejudice has been based on them -- Marxist socialism, the condemnation of private ownership, and so on. We must keep a sense of proportion. All the same it is clear that the unsolved problem of wealth, of unearned income and so on is one of the themes of our time. In the last century control passed from the hands of the wise and these burning questions no longer came up against the moderating influence of tolerance, wisdom and a sense of duty. Evils that were dealt with by the materialistic society of the nineteenth century were at the mercy of self-interest, expediency, indignation. The highest ideals were lacking and there was palpably no trace of that spiritual attitude based on the divine nature that makes us all free. So it is not surprising that ordinary people's spiritual mechanism has rusted and become practically useless. Therefore those endowed with great possessions cannot be found in the devout circle around the crib. Some are absent because their possessions have robbed them of proper insight, others because the things they covet have made them incapable of any other interest. It is undeniable that every human being is entitled to a living space, daily bread and the protection of the law as a common birthright; these are fundamentals and should not be handed out as an act of charity.

Meditation/Discussion (In what ways do your belongings or search for money keep you from truly ~~living out~~ your faith?)

4th Reading The Learned - Great learning and prayer have little in common. It was so then and is still so today. Learning is besotted and bemused by the brilliance of its own ideas and has an overweeningly high opinion of its own interpretation of the world's affairs. And whenever the world takes a course not laid down in the books it is immediately suspect.

Western thought is inordinately proud of having "grown up" in the last century. It considers itself completely adult and self-possessed. Meanwhile in obedience to its own law it is no longer spreading its wings like an eagle, no longer adventuring to the horizon. It has become a mere appendage to earthbound utility blind and blunted to certain aspects of truth. But human nature is so constituted that even in its most debased and blinded state it still needs to ape God and set itself on a pedestal as if it were divine. Unconsciously it is reaching out towards a state it might be capable of achieving if it were not so in love with itself and forever leading itself and its world into the icy mire of materialism.

No, the learned are not found among those devout souls kneeling round the crib in the stable. They are the types whom later, when Jesus was grown, the Child was to embrace in the lament "Woe, Woe"; but then they did not understand that either. The wise men, those whose prescience came from the heart, knew where they were going and the goal they were looking for. They were capable of adoration.

The thoroughly learned today cannot be bothered with prayer. Should their thoughts ever wander in the direction of the crib they would surround it with signs and symbols, propaganda slogans, culture jargon and so on. They overlook the simple unquestionable truths God has laid down. Clearly the whole destiny of the West is tied up with this problem. A glance into our schools and universities should suffice to prove that the problem of destiny is unsolved.

Meditation/Discussion (Can you sort out what you have been taught from what you know to be real for you? How does your "education" stand in the way of your faith?)

5th Reading The Established Church - The synagogue had no part in the adoration at the manger. The synogogue was in fact one-track minded: it had an expectation and had no time or attention for anything except that clear-cut idea and its hoped-for realization. The books had even foretold that Bethlehem was the place where that realization would come to pass, yet so completely were the priests shrouded in their own shriveled ideas that their senses had become numbed and that numbness prevented their recognizing the signs of their time. No star pointed the way for them, no gleam of intuition lightened their darkness. They were bemused by their own self-sufficiency and heard nothing of the angels' song.

If only this were merely a tale to point a moral. But it is the plain truth; it really happened. The new spirit of Creation flows without interruption through the new Church -- but how much force it requires to achieve its purpose. The officers of the Church have the inner guidance of the Spirit -- but what about the executive departments? And the beaurocratic officials? And the mechanical "believers" who "believe" in everything, in every ceremony, every ritual -- but know nothing whatever about the living God? One has to be very careful in formulating this thought, not from cowardice but because the subject is so awe-inspiring. One thinks of all the meaningless attitudes and gestures -- in the name of God? No, in the name of habit, of tradition, custom, convenience, safety and even -- let us be honest -- in the name of middle-class respectability which is perhaps the very least suitable vehicle for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit will go on pouring forth and bringing about its work of renewal but things might have worked more smoothly if there had been no rift, no quarrels, no secession, defamation and suspicion, if the Spirit had founding living organs to work through instead of withered officials. And the obstacles are still there. Creative theology, spiritually conscious worshippers, active, effective love have yet to be achieved. Let us go back to the genuine contact and learn its laws once more; let us regain the capacity to see visions and know intuitively, moved by the Spirit. Let us give free rein to the divine instinct with which we are endowed and climb out of this morass in which we are bogged, emerge from this trance of false security. Then we shall discover the real efficacy of prayer and its power to bless and to heal.

MEDITATION/Discussion (How does "ritual", "rite" or "churchiness" stand in the way of your faith?)

6th Reading The Crux of the Matter - Now I ought to sum all this up in a pattern of behavior towards which we could be educated so that we can be capable of knowing God once more. But I am desperately short of time. I can hear the jailer already coming down the passage and besides I have no more paper. So the friend for whom these lines are intended, and any others who may one day chance to read them, will have to gather up the ends for themselves. But one thing must be said. I shall be accused of being concerned only with the "natural" life of human beings. I will not attempt to deny or disguise the fact. But God's kindness appeared in one of the Christmas messages. Without a minimum of sound humanity, genuine human dignity, and human culture, no one is capable of making contact with God. We are not even capable of ordinary understanding and behavior.

I am perfectly aware that only extraordinary grace can reawaken us and heal us; I also know that the divine impulse is forever prompting us, yearning to be allowed to do its healing work. To proclaim this is the task of those among us who still have perception and know it for the truth.

Third Week of Advent - 4

But we will not be denied God's mercy is the law of our salvation. But the main task is to render us capable and willing for the Spirit to do its work. This is even more urgent than the proclamation of the central mystery, for no one can understand this anyway until we have surrendered and opened our hearts to the will of God within us. So it may be that even this shambles in which we now live, this devastation swept by bitter winds of fate, is the destined place and hour of a new holy night, a new birth for humanity seeking God, a new nativity. Darkness shall not frighten us or distress wear us out; we will go on waiting, watching and praying until the star arises.

Meditation/Prayer (Can you dedicate yourself to not letting anything get between you and God?)

Closing Reading: ISAIAH 55:1-13

The Prison Meditations of Father Delp, Alfred Delp, S.J. (with Introduction by Thomas Merton) MacMillan, New York, 1963.

The Fourth Week of Advent

MEDITATIONS ON THE VIGIL OF CHRISTMAS

(An excerpt from Father Delp's diary: December 28th: In the course of these last long weeks life has become suddenly much less rigid. A great deal that was once quite simple and ordinary seems to have taken on a new dimension. Things seem clearer and at the same time more profound; one sees all sorts of unexpected angles. And above all God has become almost tangible. Things I have always known and believed now seem so concrete; I believe them but I also live them.

For instance how I used to mouth the words "hope" and "trust". I know now that I used them uncomprehending, like a child. And in doing so I deprived my life of much fruitfulness and achievement, and I also cheated others of many substantial blessings because I was incapable of taking really seriously God's command that we should trust absolutely and wholeheartedly in God. Only one who really believes and hopes and trusts can form any idea of humanity's real status or catch a glimpse of the divine perspective.) He was executed on January 8th.

There has always been a lot of misunderstanding about the feast of the nativity. Superficial familiarity, sentimental creche-making and so on have to some extent distorted our view of the stupendous event the feast commemorates.

The events of history in the past few years have brought home the harsh realities of life as never before. The temptation to make an idyllic myth of Christmas are less in evidence than before. Many who have spent Christmas in dugouts and foxholes that would make the stable at Bethlehem seem cozy by comparison will have little inclination to glamorize the ox and ass. They maya even stumble on the idea of asking themselves what really happened that holy night -- was the world made a better, more beautiful place? Did life acquire a blessing because the angels sang Gloria in excelsis, because the shepherds were astounded and hurried to pay homage, because a king lost his nerve and ordered innocent children to be massacred? Yet at this point the questions have already started to run wild -- for this crime took place simply and solely because it was the holy night.

Yet Christians probably never pray more fervently than when they offer up the respirare at the conclusion of the Vigil. We breathe again because the birth of the Only-Begotten will, we trust, ease our burdens. A load has been lifted from our hearts. Life takes on a new meaning because a new perspective has been disclosed, because the decisive moment has been reached again, because the relative security we normally count on has not yet been swallowed up by the uncertainties of abnormal times.

To breathe again - To be honest, I long to be able to breathe again, to be relieved of my troubles. How earnestly I prayed the prayer for speedy deliverance in yesterday's Mass. Each day I have to steel myself for the hours of daylight and each night for the hours of darkness. In between I often kneel or sit before my silent Host and talk over with him the circumstances in which I am. Without this constant contact I should have despaired long ago.

The question that applies to the whole world applies to me personally and concretely on this feast of the nativity. Is there anything different about celebrating Mass here in this narrow cell where prayers are said and tears are shed and God is known, believed in and called on? At stated hours the key grates in the lock and my wrists are put back into handcuffs; at stated hours they are taken off -- that goes on day after day, monotonously, without variation. Where does the breathing again which God makes possible come in? And the waiting and waiting for relief -- how long? And to what end?

It is necessary to celebrate the feast of the Nativity with great realism, otherwise one's imagination will conjure up magical happenings for which one's sober reason can discover no justification nor prospect. And as a result of that the celebration of the feast could easily lead to bitter disappointment and deep depression. The vigil Mass leads to the necessary restrained, expectant and realistic frame of mind in three ways:

SECOND READING: God whose coming we celebrate is and remains the God of promise - At the introit we pray: This day you shall know -- and in the morning you shall see, clearly referring to the coming feast and the connection between it and the vigil. But it also refers to a perpetual state, to the fundamental condition of our life. It is one of the most tragic and disturbing factors of our existence that we may know a great deal and have vast experience behind us and yet fail to find a place of shelter, a secure refuge. We would so like to regard our acquired knowledge as final, to make ourselves at home here and feel secure. But every now and then we grow uncomfortably aware of the fact that our wanderings are not yet over. Again and again the truth we believe we have grasped proves to be merely a prelude, an overture to something that lies beyond, beckoning and leading us onward. And we must go on, must continue our journey if we are to be given life's reward. To call a halt before the end is reached means death, metaphysical and religious ruin.

This "in the morning you shall see" absorbs the wholesome, creative unrest to which we owe all that is genuinely alive in our own makeup. But at what a price. The Lord calls it hunger and thirst after righteousness and one needs to have experienced the agony of counting hours until the next ration of bread is due really to understand what this means and how much is expected of us in this eternal quest.

And the alternative? Indifference, resignation, insensitivity, loss of appetite, the atrophying of the organs, the loss of our spiritual nerve, overstrain and deadly fatigue -- in short one of those fatal wounds through which the lifeblood of so many human beings nowadays is ebbing away. We may think we can escape the curve of tension into which the law has forced us but in the end we come to realize that burdens are part and parcel of the condition of life.

So now at the threshold of Christmas which we like to approach as though it were a kind of earthly paradise, we come to the same motif: you shall know -- you have received tidings: you shall see -- you must be on your way to find real fulfilment in real encounter. Here again we have real tension, the theme of the bow which can only be stretched when the arrow is applied to it.

We ought to remember that we are approaching the feast of God-made-human, not of humanity rendered divine. The divine mystery takes place on earth and follows that natural course of earthly events. As the epistle so emphatically states: according to the flesh--from the seed of David. It cannot be interpreted any other way. It is an indisputable but incomprehensible fact that God enters our homes, our existence, not only like us but actually as one of us. That is the unfathomable mystery. From this point on the Child is absorbed by history, becomes part of history and shares history's fate. In the darkest cells and the loneliest prisons Christ is there; is met on the high roads and in the lanes. And this is the first blessing of the burden -- Jesus is there to help us bear it. And the second blessing of it is that all we who have to bear it know at once when the strong shoulder is pushed under to relieve the weight. And the third blessing is that since that holy night when divine life and the original pattern of existence was born on earth, strength enabling us to master life has grown from that upsurge of divine vitality in human existence and is reflected in the existence of the community, to which God revealed Godself.

We shall be better able to cope with life's demands if we remain constantly aware of the directions this night provides. Let us continue our journey along the highway of life without allowing ourselves to be deterred or frightened by occasional desolate stretches. A new spirit has entered into us and we will not waver in our belief in the star of the promises or weary of acknowledging the angels Gloria even if we sometimes have tears in our eyes as we join in. Many disasters have been turned into blessings because we have risen above them.

Third Reading: LUKE 4:16-19

Meditation/Discussion (How has God/Jesus shown that there was one present whom you could lean upon in trouble. Do you need to do that leaning now? Why? Can others help you experience that ability to find help when you need it?)

God in the Christmas encounter is still the challenging God - The greatest misconceptions all center on the typical Christmas picture of God. Here too is humanity so wrapped up in appearances that the breathtaking reality of the birth of God as a human child scarcely enters our mind and the soul doesn't grasp its significance. The truth is too tremendous to be appreciated unless one concentrates on it fully. Of course the externals -- the sweetly sentimental pictures, the carols, the creches, and so on are a comfort to humanity as a whole and to the individual. But there is a great deal more to the nativity than that. The comfort we derive from the externals is only the symbol of the far greater gifts this event, and the feast commemorating it, bestowed and continue to bestow on us. Since the birth of our Lord humanity has been confirmed in the hope which turns us to God's throne for grace: God is on our side. But this does not mean that God has dethroned Godself any more than it means that our lives have been turned into a primrose path by that stupendous event.

We need to look critically at this tendency to sentimentalize the divine attributes by personifying them in the person of an innocent child or by over-beautifying the figure of the adult Jesus. The glamorizing of the nativity story, the lowering of the whole tone of Christ's life to the level of a baroque sermon full of portentous warnings and grave moralizings has contributed quite

a lot to the West's present helplessness in the face of conditions that keep it fettered and restrained. Certainly God became human -- a human being among human beings -- but nevertheless God, creator of all the universe. Therefore we, the created being, must approach this God-made-us with reverence and adoration, subjugating ourselves in order to find ourselves -- it is the only way.

The vigil points out how we ought to approach this feast. Whoever enters into the divine way of life automatically comes under divine guidance. That, as far as the worshipper is concerned, means that the nearer we get to God the more we long to return there for it is essentially a homecoming. God's nearness has dynamic power. As worshippers, we may know by the state of unrest into which we are thrown by this attraction just how much we have grasped of the secret relationship between God and us.

And the vigil further prevents our becoming bemused by the over-glamorized picture of the divine Child by pointing out another fundamental relationship between God and us. The collect reminds us suddenly and unexpectedly that the child in fact is already sitting in judgment over our lives. The increased capacity for life which comes from understanding this warning, the awakened sense of responsibility, remains with us long after Christmas is over provided we have entered the vigil in the proper spirit. And if we remember that the divine Child is already engaged in the serious business of judging the world how many of the people who represent the human race today can honestly approach the crib? Most of them don't even want to. The small and narrow door will not admit those who come riding on a high horse. But simple shepherds have no difficulty in getting through. The star leads the regal wise men to it but the arrogance of Jerusalem is thrown into a panic by the Child. How much there is in our lives today that cannot face the Child. How different our individual lives would be if only we realized that the world's supreme hour struck that midnight when Almighty God condescended to come among us as a little child. We should not behave so greedily, so arrogantly, so highhandedly to one another if we did.

Every hour of our Lord's life from the crib to the Cross by which we were redeemed is a judgment on some part of our existence. That is why we are often so defeated and so in trouble. But the last hour was a resurrection, a glorious homecoming, for both Christ and for us. We ought to take the Christ Child very seriously.

Meditation/Discussion: (Silently think of the things which God is judging in <u>your</u> life in light of Jesus' teachings and life. What can you do to change that? How can you become more obedient to the Word made flesh?)

<u>God whose coming we joyfully await is still the God of judgment</u> - It is no easy or light matter to face the scrutiny of the divine Judge. Obedience to the Word which has to be the basis of our lives increases our responsibility. But even that is not the end. Over and above rules are the entirely personal twists and turns of fate through which God intervenes in the lives of individuals. And so often God seems to leave us alone with our burden to cope with our troubles as best we can.

Let us reread the Gospel from a purely human angle -- looking at this episode in their lives from a purely human point of view:

Fourth Reading:

We know how it all ended so it doesn't disturb us, but at the time there must have been a great deal of heartache. Joseph's belief in a trusted human being was shattered -- but what must Mary herself have gone through? She had dedicated herself to God -- her submission was complete and unreserved. She had received the Word in a way no other human being would ever share. And then God became silent. She must have felt society's questioning eyes following her; she must have known the torment Joseph was going through and the blow his sense of justice had received. And God left her alone in this hour with all the weight of her trouble pressing on her. From a purely human point of view what a terrible position to be in.

And what about our own fate? We have heart the promises and believed in the messages and accepted the prophecies. And then something unexpected happens and our life is twisted out of shape -- human life is subject to that sort of thing, even the life of Christians. Ought it to be different in their case? It isn't. And it is precisely when we come up against occurrences like this that our faith is put to the real test. To adhere steadfastly to the Word even when we strike our foot against a stone, even when we feel we are beaten, even when we are fastened in chains and handcuffs -- that is the answer. And that is the answer that will be expected when each of us is questioned at the seat of judgment; no one can escape it. God is posing that very question to us today in a hundred different ways and we have to see to it that we have the right answers. Steadfastness is not an easy virtue to acquire, but it makes us fit to meet our Maker and it opens our eyes to the actual reality of God.

Once we honestly try to acquire it the face of the whole world is changed. The stark features of unavoidable accident, of logical consequence and necessity are softened. The world and life take on a more friendly look -- they seem to assume almost parental compassion. The thousand and one small blessings which God takes delight in showering on humanity begin to reveal God's nearness to us. Outwardly things are just as before and yet something has happened -- there is a new consciousness of God's parental care in those who have stood the test of God's questions. Suddenly we discover that events are not impersonal and universal but that they have more than one meaning. In the personal dialogue between God and us which is the whole point of life, achievements have meanings quite different from those usually attributed to them. And what one person regards as trivial everyday occurrences are to another blessed signs of God's mercy and guidance.

Meditation/Discussion (Out of some difficulty which you may be experiencing, what guidance could God be trying to give you? How, in that problem, could God be speaking to <u>you</u>?)

Fifth Reading: ISAIAH 11:1-10

<u>To breathe again</u> - That brings us back to <u>respirare</u>, the deep breath of relief which can, and should bring ease. Nothing has happened to the world but it is now the ark of God which no storm can overturn, no flood can wreck. Life has not shaken off its laws or lost its tension but the Lord has subdued it, made sense of it all.

The very tensions are harnessed now to increase the strength and power of humanity.

And there is one other thing -- we are no longer on our own. Monologue has never been able to make our lives happy and healthy; we are only genuinely alive when we are engaged in dialogue. All mono-tendencies are evil. But by bringing the God-imposed tensions and burdens into the dialogue the most terrible of all human maladies -- loneliness -- is overcome. From that point there are no more starless nights, no more days of solitary confinement, no more lonely paths or pitfalls without companionship or guidance. God with us. That was the promise, that was what we prayed for and cried out for. In God's own way, in the natural course of things, far more simply but also far more effectively than we could ever have imagined, God came to us as our ally.

We must not try to shirk the burdens imposed on us. They are God's way of communicating with us and they are God's blessing. Whever is true to life, however hard and barren it may seem at the moment, will discover within fountains of real refreshment. The world will give you more than you ever imagined possible. The silver threads of God's mystery will begin to sparkle visibly in everything around you and there will be a song in your heart. Your burdens will turn to blessings because you will recognize them a coming from God and welcome them as such.

God becomes human but humanity does not become divine. The human order remains unchanged with the same obligations. But it has acquired a blessing and we have grown in stature, have become stronger, mightier. Let us trust in life because this night will pass and a new day will dawn. Let us trust in life because we do not have to live through it alone. God is with us.

Meditation/Discussion (What are some of ways you are aware that God is with you? Can you share with each other some of the experiences when God's presence has been made manifest to you?)

Final Reading: Luke 2:1-19

Closing Prayer

PRE: MCE Movie

TOPIC: The Pacific

DATE: 11/1/65

SUB: 12 Days of Christmas

THE WHOLE POINT OF THE GROUP

While it may seem early to plan this far in advance -- let me say that it is not. We need to get the commitments from people as to what they are planning to do so it is not what, but least when.

The dates are:

	ACTIVITY	DATE
DECEMBER 18 -	Midnight Service at the church.	
DECEMBER 21 -		
DECEMBER 22 -		
DECEMBER 23 -		
DECEMBER 24 -		
DECEMBER 25 -		
DECEMBER 26 -		
JANUARY 1 -		
JANUARY 2 -		
JANUARY 3 -		
JANUARY 4 -		
JANUARY 5 -		
JANUARY 6 -		

Anything within these dates is acceptable game. If you can have people at for dinner and activity for a meal, this is better, but thanks for the contact, for a meals and presents, for a time fellowship, for a overall look, for fun and merry's, for our God, for church and school or other ministries, for a King's birthday celebration. Concerts that we sponsor also can count as. If you want to host such a celebration, let know! The goal is 12 days of Christmas, one for each day of the church, but not to exclude that you may have all. If you have any questions, ask. We'll try to answer.

TO: MCC Mobile DATE: 11/17/85

FROM: The Pastor RE: 12 Days of Christmas

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

While it may seem early to plan this far in advance -- let me say that it is not. We need to get firm committments from people as to what they are planning to do or if not what, at least when.

The dates are

	ACTIVITY	NAME
DECEMBER 24 -	Midnight Service at the church.	
DECEMBER 25 -		
DECEMBER 26 -		
DECEMBER 27 -		
DECEMBER 28 -		
DECEMBER 29 -		
DECEMBER 30 -		
DECEMBER 31 -		
JANUARY 1 -		
JANUARY 2 -		
JANUARY 3 -		
JANUARY 4 -		
JANUARY 5 -		
JANUARY 6 -		

Anything within reason that is appropriate goes -- you can have people in for desert and coffee, for a meal, for a buffet, for brunch (on the weekend), for a movie and popcorn, for a tree dismantling, for a wassail bowl, for Tom and Jerry's, for egg nog, for punch and cookies or finger sandwiches, for a King's Day celebration (January 6th) or anything else you can dream up. If you want to host such a celebration, but haven't the space or live at home, use the parsonage or the church, both can be available (but you must host it). If you have any questions, ask. We'll try to answer.

ADVENT MEDITATIONS

Those who are used to the normal run of spiritual books and meditations may have to adjust themselves to a new and perhaps disturbing outlook. These meditations were written by a man literally in chains, condemned to be executed as a traitor to his country in time of war. They are completely free from the myopic platitudes and insensitive complacencies of routine piety. Set in the familiar framework of seasonal meditations on Advent, these are new and often shocking insights into realities which we sometimes discuss academically, but which are here experienced in their naked, uncompromising truth. These are the thoughts of a man who, caught in a well-laid trap of political lies, clung desperately to a truth that was revealed to him in solitude, helplessness, emptiness and desperation. Face to face with inescapable physical death, he reached out in anguish for the truth without which his spirit could not breath and survive. The truth was granted him, and we share it in these meditations, awed by the realization that it was given him not for himself alone, but for us, who need it just as desperately -- perhaps more desperately -- than he did.

These meditations were written in Advent of 1944. Defeat for the Nazis was already certain. Hitler alone refused to see it, and was still receiving lucky answers from the stars. Father Delp had long since refused to accept the collective delusion. In 1943 he had joined the secret discussions of the Kreisau Circle, an anti-Nazi group that was planning a new social order to be built on Christian lines after the war. That was all. But since it implied a complete repudiation of the compulsive myths and preposterous fictions of Nazism, it constituted high treason.

Father Delp was tried in a trial that was a show, staged by a specialist in such matters...Father Delp was singled out as one of the chief villains, and in his case, the prosecution smeared not only the prisoner but the Jesuit Order and the Catholic Church as well. The prosecution also tried to incriminate them in the attempted assassination of Hitler the previous July, but this was obviously out of the question and the charge was dropped. This was plainly a religious trial. The crime was heresy against Nazism. As Father Delp summed it up in his last letter: "The actual reason for my condemnation was that I happened to be and chose to remain a Jesuit." (He might well have said, "Because I chose to remain a Christian.")

Father Delp had no hesitation in evaluating the choice of those who, in the name of religion (as many had) followed the Nazi government in its policy of conquest first and a new world later. He said:

> "The most pious prayer can become a blasphemy if he who offers it tolerates or helps to further conditions which are fatal to humanity, which render us unacceptable to God, or weaken our spiritual, moral or religious sense."

What is their value to us in Metropolitan Community Church? Father Delp cared desperately that each of us would respond to an inner need for truth, and struggle to recover our spiritual freedom. He wants us to listen to the voice crying in the wilderness -- to become aware of our devastated condition before it is too late. He begs us to confront God, to face inner solitude and recover mysterious sources of hope and strength. Father Delp believed that we are often blind to spiritual things even when we think we are seeing them: and indeed perhaps most blind when we are convinced that we see. We are surrendered, too often, as persons to be used

Those who are used to the normal run of political books and meditations may have to adjust themselves to a new and perhaps disturbing outlook. These meditations were written by a man literally in chains, condemned to be executed as a traitor to his country in time of war. They are completely free from the usually plausible and tangentially complimentary of rousing platitude. Yet in the familiar framework of sermonal meditations on Advent, there are new and often shocking insights into reality which we ourselves discover unconsciously, but which are here experienced to their naked, uncompromising truth. These are the thoughts of a man who, outside in a well-lit hall of political life, during desperately in a truth that was revealed to him in solitude, loneliness, sickness and desperation. Face to face with inescapable physical death, he reached out in anguish for the truth without which life would not breath and survive. The truth was revealed him, and we share it in these meditations, read by the radiation that it was given him not for himself alone, but for us, who need it just as desperately -- perhaps more desperately -- than he did.

These meditations were written in Advent of 1944. Before for the Xmas was already reached. Bishop Bonhoeffer to see it, and was still receiving letters from the abyss. Father Delp had long since refused to accept the collective delusion. In 1943 he had joined the secret discussions of the Freiburg Circle, an anti-Nazi group that was planning a new social order to be built on Christian lines after the war. That was all. But enough to implicate a complete repudiation of the complacent myths and preposterous fictions of Nazism, it constituted high treason.

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Introduction

as "things" and our spiritual creativity has dried up at its source. We are no longer alive with passionate convictions, but centered on our own empty and alienated selves, and we become destructive, negative, violent. We lose all insight, all compassion. Or else our souls, shocked into insensitivity by suffering and alienation, remain simply numb, inert and hopeless. We hope in matter and the power we can gain from manipulation of it. Or else, in abject self-contempt, we believe in our own unworthiness more than in the creative power of God.

Father Delp calls us from traditional "spirituality" or "piety" to the creative unrest of the truly spiritual person. He calls us away from "religion" which has become formal, apathetic, bloodless, and unloving. He calls us to truly please God, by regaining our humanity, to face our desperation, and to stop giving the illusion of holiness and stop concerning ourselves with feeding our own pious souls for our own satisfaction. Father Delp wants us to concern ourselves with freedom, to regain our spiritual health, grow and respond to God. "None of the contemporary religious movements take for their starting point the position of humanity as human beings...they do not help us in the depths of our need but merely skim the surface...They concentrate on the difficulties of the religious minded who still have religious leanings. They do not succeed in coordinating the forms of religion with a state of existence that no longer accepts its values. We need to find out what people need, and to devote some thought to the question that possibly, in a dialogue with them, they might have something to give us."

The Advent discovery that Father Delp made, pacing up and down in his cell in chains was that in the very midst of his desolation, the messengers of God were present. This discovery was in no way due to his own spiritual efforts, his own will to believe, his own purity of heart. The "blessed messengers" were pure gifts from God, which could never have been anticipated, never foreseen, never planned by human consciousness. In the darkness of defeat and degradation, the seeds of light and hope were being sown. In his Advent meditations, with all the simplicity of traditional Christian faith, and in images that are seldom remarkable for any special originality, Father Delp describes in the ruin of the society around him an "advent" in which the messengers of God are preparing for the future. "Unless we have been shocked to our depths by ourselves and the things we are capable of, as well as the failings of humanity as a whole, we cannot understand the full import of Advent." Father Delp is reiterating St. Paul's realization of our helplessness and God's grace, not as opposed, fighting for primacy in our lives, but as a single existential unit -- sinful humanity redeemed in Christ. Father Delp cries out for Christian liberty and personal dignity -- and yet liberation from fixation on our own subjective needs and compulsions -- recognizing that we cannot fully become persons until we understand our need for community and our duty of serving others.

These meditations are both disturbing and hopeful. There is something mystical about them -- yet the mystic recognized a responsibility to be engaged in political action, and because he followed messengers of God into the midst of fanatical and absurb political crisis, he was put to death. There is a place for the prophet and the mystic in our century. Certainly in MCC, we have been surrounded by both -- and yet by mystics who were not totally outside of society, not removed from the world. This mystic did not reject the world in order to seek his own salvation without concern for the rest of humanity. Nor must we. The freedom seeking person,

on "things" and our political organizations have dried up at the source. We are no longer alive with passionate convictions, but centered on our own energy and alienated selves, and we become destructive, negative, violent. We lose all humility, all compassion. Or else our souls, shocked into inertia by suffering and alienation, remain simply numb, inert and hopeless. We hope in vain and the power we can gain from manipulation of it. Or else, in at least self-contempt, we believe in our own unworthiness more than in the creative power of God.

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ADVENT MEDITATIONS

THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

OPENING PRAYER

Advent is the time for rousing. We are shaken to our very depths, so that we may wake up to the truth of ourselves. The primary condition for a fruitful and rewarding Advent is renunciation, surrender. We must let go of our mistaken dreams, out conceited poses and arrogant gesture, all the pretenses with which we hope to deceive ourselves and others. If we fail to do this stark reality may take hold of us and rouse us forcibly in a way that will entail both anxiety and suffering.

The kind of awakening that literally shocks our whole being is part and parcel of the Advent idea. A deep emotional experience like this is necessary to kindle the inner light which confirms the blessing and the promise of the Lord. A shattering awakening; that is the necessary preliminary. Life only begins when the whole framework is shaken. There can be no proper preparation without this. It is precisely in the shock of rousing while we are still deep in the helpless, semi-conscious state, in the pitiable weakness of that borderland between sleep and waking, that we find the golden thread which binds earth to heaven and gives the benighted soul some inkling of the fullness it is capable of realizing and is called upon to realize.

We ought not to ignore Advent meditations like these. We have to listen, to keep watch, to let our heart quicken under the impulse of the indwelling Spirit. Only in this quiescent state can the true blessing of Advent be experienced and then we shall also recognize it in other ways. Once awakened to an inner awareness we are constantly surprised by symbols bearing the Advent message, figures of tried and proved personalities that bring out in a most forceful way the inner meaning of Advent and emphasize its blessing.

I am thinking of three in particular--The voice crying in the wilderness, the herald angel, and Mary.

The Voice Crying in the Wilderness -- We live in an age which has every right to consider itself no wilderness. But woe to any age in which the voice crying in the wilderness can no longer be heard because the noises of everyday life drown it -- or restrictions forbid it -- or it is lost in the hurry and turmoil of "progress" -- or simply stifled by authority, misled by fear and cowardice. Then the destructive weeds will spreak so suddenly and rapidly that the word "wilderness" will recur to our minds willy-nilly. I believe we are no strangers to this discovery.

Yet for all this, where are the voices that should ring out in protest and accusation? There should never be any lack of prophets like John the Baptist in the kaleidoscope of life at any period; brave people inspired by the dynamic compulsion of the mission to which they are dedicated, true witnesses following the lead of their hearts and endowed with clear vision and unerring judgment. Such people do not cry out for the sake of making a noise or the pleasure of hearing their own voices, or because they envy others the good things which have not come their way on account of their singular attitude towards life. They are above envy and have a solace known only to those who have crossed both the inner and outer borders of existence. These people proclaim the message of healing and salvation. They warn us of our chance, because they can already feel the ground heaving beneath their feet, feel the beams cracking and the great mountains shuddering inwardly and the stars swining in space. They cry out to us,urging us to save ourselves by a change of heart before the coming of the catastrophes threatening to overwhelm us.

ADVENT DOCTRINE

THE FIRST WORK OF ADVENT

Advent is the time for rousing. We are placed to our very depths, so that we may wake up to the truth of ourselves. The primary condition for a fruitful and rewarding Advent is renunciation, surrender. We must let go of our mistaken dreams, our crowded pews and arrogant gestures, all the preciousness with which we hope to deceive ourselves and others. It is hard to do this attack reality may take hold of us and move us forcibly in a way that will entail both anxiety and suffering.

The kind of awakening that literally shocks our whole being is part and parcel of the Advent idea. A deep emotional experience like this is necessary to kindle the inner light which confirms the blessing and the promise of the Lord. A shattering awakening that is the necessary preliminary. It is only begun when the whole framework is shaken. There can be no proper preparation without this. It is precisely in the shock of rousing while we are still deep in the helpless, nonsense ruins, in the pitiable weakness of that borderland between sleep and waking, that we find the golden thread which leads earth to heaven and gives the benighted world some knowing of the holiness it is capable of realizing and is called upon to realize.

We ought not to ignore Advent manifestations like these. We have to listen, to keep watch, to let our hearts awaken under the impulse of the indwelling Spirit. Only in this quickened state can the true blessing of Advent be experienced and then we shall also recognize it in other ways. Once sensitized to an inner awareness we are constantly surprised by symbols bearing the Advent message, figures of speech and proved personalities that bring out in a most forceful way the inner meaning of Advent and emphasize its blessing.

I am thinking of them in particular—Christians crying in the wilderness, the herald angel, and Mary.

[illegible] — We listen and we [illegible] overwhelmed by the wilderness. But one is very sure in which the voices crying in the wilderness can no longer be heard because the noises of everyday life drown it. — or sentimentalism drowned it -- or it is lost in the hurry and bustle of "progress" -- or simply stifled by sensitivity, muted by fear and cowardice. When the destructive waste will spread so suddenly and rapidly that the mere "wilderness" will cease to mean a place where voices are no strangers to this discovery.

Not for all that, there are the voices that should ring out in protest and accusation. These should never be any lack of prophets like John the Baptist in the bewilderment of life at any period; brave people inspired by the dynamic convictions of the mission to which they are dedicated, have witnessed following the lead of their leader and endowed with clear vision and unerring judgment. Such people do not say out for the sake of making a noise or the pleasure of hearing their own voices, or because they enjoy the good things which have not come their way on account of their singular attitude towards life. They are above envying and have a richer lesson only to those who have crossed both the inner and outer borders of wilderness. These people proclaim the message of healing and salvation. They were up of our climate, because they are already feel the ground heaving beneath their feet, feel the inner earthquake and the great mountains shuddering inwardly and the stars crashing in space. They may not be so anything as to save ourselves by a change of heart before the coming of the catastrophes threatening to overwhelm us.

The First Week of Advent - 2

O God, surely enough people nowadays know what it means to clear away bomb dust and rubble of destruction, making the rough places smooth again. They will know it for many years to come with this labor weighing upon them. O, may the arresting voices of the wilderness ring out warning humanity in good time that ruin and devastation actually spread from within. May the Advent figure of St. John the Baptist, the incorruptible herald and teacher in God's name, be no longer a stranger in our own wilderness. Much depends on such symbolic figures in our lives. For how shall we hear if there is none to cry out, none whose voice can rise above the tumult of violence and destruction, the false clamor that deafens us to reality.

Second Reading: Isaiah 40: 1-11

Meditation/Discussion (Who have been some of the "Voices crying in the Wilderness" in your life?)

The Herald Angel -- Never have I entered on Advent so vitally and intensely alert as I am now. When I pace my cell, up and down, three paces one way and three the other, my hands manacled, an unknown fate in front of me, then the tidings of our Lord's coming to redeem the world and deliver it have a quite different and more vivid meaning. And my mind keeps going back to the angel someone gave me as a present during Advent two or three years ago. It bore the inscription: "Be of good cheer. The Lord is near." A bomb destroyed it. The same bomb killed the donor and I often have the feeling that he is rendering me some heavenly aid. It would be impossible to endure the horror of these times -- like the horror of life itself, could we only see it clearly enough -- if there were not this other knowledge which constantly buoys us up and gives us strength: the knowledge of the promises that have been given and fulfilled. And the awareness of the angels of good tidings, uttering their blessed messages in the midst of all this trouble and sowing the seed of blessing where it will sprout in the middle of the night. The angels of Advent are not the bright jubilant beings who trumpet the tidings of fulfilment to a waiting world. Quiet and unseen they enter our shabby rooms and our hearts as they did of old. In the silence of night they pose God's questions and proclaim the wonders of Christ with whom all things are possible.

Advent, even when things are going wrong, is a period from which a message can be drawn. May the time never come when we forget about the good tidings and promises when so immured within the four walls of our prisons our very eyes are dimmed and we see nothing but grey days through barred windows placed too high to see out of. May the time never come when we no longer hear the soft footsteps of the herald angel, or the cheering words that penetrate the soul. Should such a time come all will be lost. Then indeed we shall be living in bankruptcy and hope will die in our hearts. For the first thing we must do if we want to raise ourselves out of this sterile life is to open our hearts to the golden seed which God's angels are waiting to sow in it. And one other thing: We must ourselves go forth through out these days as a bringer of glad tidings. There is so much despair that cries out for comfort; there is so much faint courage that needs to be reinforced; there is so much perplexity that yearns for reasons and meanings. God's messengers, who have themselves reaped the fruits of divine seeds sown even in the darkest hours, know how to wait for the fullness of harvest. Patience and faith are needed, not because we believe in the earth or in our stars, or in our temperament or our good disposition, but because we have received the message of God's herald angel and have ourselves encountered God's messenger.

Fourth Reading: Luke 1: 5-17

Discussion/Meditation (How have "Herald Angels" come to you in time of need?)

O God, surely enough people nowadays know what it means to clear away lush dust and rubble of destruction, making the rough places smooth again. They will know it for many years to come with dirt labor weighing upon them. O, may the screeching voices of the wilderness ring out warning humanity to good time that grim and devastation actually spread from within. May the Advent figure of St. John the Baptist, the incorruptible herald and healer in God's name, be no longer a stranger in our own wilderness. Much depends on such symbolic figures in our lives. For but shall we be hard at there to make to any out, none whose voice can rise above the tumult of violence and destruction, the false clamor that deafens us to reality.

Second Reading: Isaiah 40: 1-11

Meditation/Dramatization (Who have been some of the "Voices crying in the Wilderness" in your life?)

The Herald Angel -- Never have I entered on Advent so vitally and intensely alert as I do now. When I pace my cell, up and down, three paces one way and three the other, my hands manacled, an unknown face in front of me, then the tidings of our Lord's coming to redeem the world and deliver it have a quite different and more vivid meaning. And my mind leaps going back to the angel commons gave me as a present during Advent two or three years ago. Thinking the inscription: "Be of good cheer. The Lord is near." A book destroyed it. The name bomb killed the donor and I often have the feeling that he is redeeming me some heavenly aid. It would be impossible to endure the horror of these times -- like the horror of life itself, could we only see it clearly enough -- if there were not this other knowledge which constantly buoys us up and gives us strength: the knowledge of the promises that have been given and fulfilled. And the awareness of the angels of good tidings, uttering their blessed messages in the midst of all this trouble and making the road of pilgrimage where it will sprout in the middle of the night. The angels of Advent are not the bright brilliant beings who transport the tidings of fulfillment to a waiting world. Quiet and unseen they enter our shabby rooms and our hearts as they did of old. In the silence of night they pass God's quietness and proclaim the wonders of Christ with them all things are possible.

Advent, even when things are going wrong, is a period from which a message can be drawn. May the time never come when we forget about the good tidings and promises which we treasured within the four walls of our prisons, our very eyes are dimmed and we see nothing but gray days through barred windows placed too high to see out of. May the time never come when we no longer hear the soft footsteps of the heavenly angel, or the cheering words that penetrate the soul. Should such a time come all will be lost. When indeed we shall be living in bondage and hope will die in our hearts. For the first thing we must do if we want to make ourselves out of this wretch like to open our hearts to the golden seed which God's angels are walking to sow in it. And one other thing: We must ourselves go forth through out these days as a bringer of glad tidings. There is so much despair that enters out for sorrow; there is so much false courage that needs to be reinforced; there is so much peculiarly that young for succor and encouraging. God's messengers, who have themselves reached the fruits of divine seeds sown even in the darkest hours, know how to wait for the fullness of harvest. Patience and faith are needed, not because we believe in the earth or in our stars, or in our temperament or our good disposition, but because we have received the message of God's herald angel and have ourselves encountered God's messenger.

Third Reading:

Meditation/Dramatization (Who have "Herald Angels" come to you in time of need?)

Mary - She is a comforting figure. The fact that the angel's annunciation found a comforting heart ready to receive the Word, and that it grew beyond its earthly environment to the very heights of heaven, is the holiest of all Advent consolations. What use are all the lessons learned through our suffering and misery if no bridge can be thrown from our side to the other shore? What is the point of our return from error and fear if it brings no enlightenment, does not penetrate the darkness and dispel it? What use is it shuddering at the world's coldness, which all the time grows more intense, if we cannot discover the grace to conjure up visions of better conditions?

Authors of legends and fairy tales have always used mothers as a favorite theme for rousing the strongest human feelings. Often mothers are a symbol of the earth's fertility. Behind this symbolism lies a universal hunger and yearning, we all want consolation and comforting. We each at times need to present ourselves before God and seek the trustful security of a mother's heart, to find ourselves back at our roots.

On the grey horizon eventually light will dawn. The foreground is very obtrusive; it asserts itself so firmly with its noise and bustle but it does not really amount to much. The things that really matter are further off -- there conditions are different. The woman has conceived a child, has carried it and has brought forth one new human being -- and thereby the world has passed under a new law. You see, this is not just a sequence of historical events that stand out in isolation. It is a symbol of the new order of things that affects the whole of our life and every phase of our being.

Today we must have the courage to look at Jesus' mother as a symbolic figure. At the core of these times through which we are living are also carried the blessing and mystery of God. They are pregnant times. It is only a matter of waiting and of knowing how to wait until the hour has struck and we will be delivered. Meanwhile we are held close and secure.

Sixth Reading: Luke 1:46-56

Meditation/Discussion (How have you been comforted -- spiritually and really -- when you have needed it?)

Advent in three holy and symbolic forms. It is not meant as a flight of fancy but as a message addressed to me and to you, reader, if ever these pages find you. Its purpose is not good prose but an exposition of truth which we must refer to again and again as a standard and a source of encouragement when the burden of our days becomes too heavy and confining.

Let us pray for receptive and willing hearts that the warnings God sends us may penetrate our minds and help us to overcome the wilderness of life. Let us have the courage to take the words of the Messenger to heart and not ignore them, lest those who are our executioners today may at some future time be our accusers for the suppression of truth.

And let us kneel and pray for clear vision, that we may recognize God's messenger when one comes, and willing hearts to understand the words of the message. The world is greater than the burden it bears, and life is more than the total of its days. Golden threads of reality are already shining through; if we look we can see them shining everywhere. Let us never forget this; we must be our own comforters. The one who promotes hope is a person of promise, one of whom much may be expected.

MARY - She is a comforting figure. The fact that the angel's announcement found a comforting heart ready to receive the Word, and that it grew beyond her carefully cultivated to the very delights of heaven, is the holiest of all Advent considerations. What was we all the lessons learned through our preferring and always if we holds can be thrown from our paths to the unknowable. What is the point of our certain fear never and fear if it brings no enlightenment, does not penetrate the darkness and dispel it? What use is it muddling at the world's doldrum, which all the time grows more lukewarm, if we cannot discover the grace to conjure up visions of better conditions?

Legends of legends and fairy tales have always used motif as a favorite theme for rousing the strongest human feelings. Often motifs are a symbol of the ensuing fertility. Walled this symbolism like a universal hunger and yearning, we all want consolation and confirmation. We each at times need to pressure ourselves beyond and seek the textural security of a motivate heart, to find ourselves back at our center.

In the grey bottom eventually light will dawn. The foreground is very objectively it reacts literally as firmly with its notes and hurtle but it does not really account so much. The things that really matter are further off -- there conditions are different. The woman has conceived a child, has nourished it and has brought forth one new human being -- and thereby the world has passed under a new law. Our age, this is not just a resonance of historical events that occurred our in Jerusalem. It is a symbol of the new order of things that affects the whole of our life and every place of our being.

Today we must have the courage to look at Jesus' mother as a symbolic figure. At the core of these stories through which we are taught are also revealed the literally and symbolic of God. They are permanent times. It is only a matter of waiting and of knowing how to wait until the hour has struck and we will be delivered. Meanwhile we are held close and secure.

Stock meaning: Luke 1:46-55

Meditation/Discussion: (Have you been confused -- emotionally and really -- when you have waited?)

Advent is those holy and symbolic times. It is not meant as a flight of fancy but as a message addressed to me and to you, today, if ever there was a time for the purpose is not good prose but an expulsion of truth which we must relate to again and again as a standard and a source of encouragement when the burden of our days becomes too heavy and confusing.

Let us pray for receptive and willing hearts that the wondrous God sends us may penetrate our minds and help us to understand the wilderness of life. Let us have the courage to cries the words of the Magnificat to heart and not ignore them. Let those who are our economic masters today may at long glance find in our necessity for the suppression of truth.

And let us kneel and pray for clear vision, that we may recognize God's encounter when one comes, and willing hearts to understand the words of the message. The world is greater than the human is large, and life is more than the total of its days. Golden threads of reality are already winding through. If we look we can see them winding everywhere. Let us never forget that we must be our own evangelists. The one who proclaims hope is a person of promise, one of whom much may be expected.

ADVENT MEDITATIONS

These meditations are drawn from a book by Father Alfred Delp, S.J. who was executed by the Nazis in Germany in 1945. Just before his death, Father Delp wrote a diary and a series of Advent meditations which were smuggled out of his prison page by page.

Opening Prayer

First Reading: Life with God and in God has its own laws and we cannot discover what they are from a reference book. Yet the conditions for their fulfilment are very straightforward and clear-cut -- less obscure than those of the ten commandments. All the same the thin thread on which they depend, the thread which unites the personal Thou of God with the personal I of the created being, can only be spun when they are being fulfilled.

The bridge linking the human with the divine has a very definite architecture. The foundations are God's affair. In God's all-embracing omnipotence there is a reaching out to humanity in a thousand different ways. To penetrate God's mysteries, to prayerfully and reverently become aware of God, is one of the highest exercises of the human mind and we are most likely to find the key to God's perpetual, relentless, compassionate, gracious reaching-out toward us in the lives of those we call saints. But the pattern which God has set for a relationship with humanity is not our present concern. If that were my only pre-occupation I should simply be satisfying a pious but very ordinary curiosity in spite of the exalted subject. But in order to get anywhere I must probe much more deeply, as indeed I am trying to do. It is a question of the fundamental conditions we must achieve in our own personal lives -- what we have to do is draw the bowstring taut and release the arrow so that the creative dialogue may begin.

I am not here casting the least doubt on the dogmatic teaching of the divine omnipotence and its goodwill toward humanity. There is no hint of doubt of the operation of grace, of God's goodness or of the merit of good deeds and decisions by which we confirm our attitude toward our Maker. But within this framework we have certain liberties and responsibilities and these are the crux of the matter. It is here that mere curiosity is converted into existential thought about the mystery of the success -- or failure -- of one's life.

To take an example: How is it that the most eloquent, logical, well-prepared sermon may produce response in some and leave others unmoved? How is it that whole generations and periods can exist in complete ignorance of, or without response to, the idea of God's creative immanence as though they were incapable of receiving the divine impulse? How is it that there are people in all periods of history who remain unmoved by the greatest miracles, by the most convincing proofs of providential guidance, by the severest penalties, or by the most inexorable strokes of divine justice?

Obviously this is more than merely an interesting theological or philosophical question -- it is very pertinent to our fate today. It sums up everything and on the attitude we adopt to it depends whether we are going to place ourselves once again under God's grace or whether, on the contrary, we are going to continue this miserable dance of death to the bitter end.

ADVENT MEDITATIONS

These meditations are drawn from a book by another Alfred Delp, S.J., who was executed by the Nazis in Germany in 1945. Just before his death, Father Delp wrote a diary and a series of Advent meditations which were smuggled out of his prison cell by proxy.

Opening Prayer

Direct Teaching: Like with God and in God has the own law and we cannot discover what they are from a reference book. Yet the candidates for state Parliament are very straightforward and clear-cut -- lean observers from those of the top commandments. All the same the kind thread of which they designed the thread which nurtures the personal Plan of God with the personal I of the created being, can only be spun when they are being faithful.

The bridge linking the human with the divine has a very definite architecture. The foundations are God's affair. In God's all-embracing omnipotence there is a reaching out to humanity in a thousand different ways. To penetrate God's mysteries, to prayerfully and reverently become aware of God, is one of the highest exercises of the human mind and we are most likely to find the key to God's purposes, relationships, commandments, practices reasonably put toward us in the lives of those we call saints. But the mystery which God has set for a relationship with humanity is not our present concern. It that were my only pre-occupation I also ld simply backslaping a point very obvious very probably in spite of the spiritual subject. But in order to get anywhere I must write much more deeply, as indeed I am trying to do. It is a question of the fundamental conditions we must achieve in our own personal lives -- what we have to do in fact the something that releases the person so that the creative dialogue may begin.

I am not here seeking the least doubt on the dogmatic teaching of the divine omnipotence and the godhill eternal humanity. There is no hint of doubt of the operation of grace, of God's guidance or of the merits of good deeds and destiny by which we realize our attitude toward our maker. But which side Economack we have certain liberties and responsibilities and there are the sure of the matter. While here that were mysterious in operated into substantial thought about the mystery of the goodness -- or realities -- of man's life.

To take an example: Who is it that the most eloquent, logical, well-prepared sermon may produce response in some and leave others unmoved? Who is it that with the generations and periods can exist in complete ignorance of, or without response to, the idea of God's creative Immanence or Though they were inherently of receiving the divine Impulse? Who is it that there are people in all periods of history who remain unmoved by the greatest miracles, by the most convincing proofs of providential guidance, by the severest penalties, or by the most lamentable strokes of divine Justice?

Obviously this is more than merely an intercepting theological or philosophical question -- it is a very pertinent to our life today. It runs to everybody and on the contrary we about to it depends whether we are going to place convinced once again under God's grace or whether, on the contrary, we are going to continue this interminable dance of death to the bitter end.

It comes down to this -- and there is no escape -- to which order will humanity give allegiance? Are we prepared to promote conditions in which the living contact with God can be re-established? For our lives have become Godless to the point of complete vacuity. God is no longer with us in the conscious sense of the word. God is denied, ignored, excluded from every claim to have a part in our daily life. We have ceased to admit God to our lives, we behave as if we no longer need God, and what is worse, we have actually become incapable of being God-conscious. It is a terrible thing to say about this modern world but as far as I can see it is true. We don't even have to look very far for proof of it -- there is sufficient evidence in the things that are happening every day, and pious horror at the state of the world will not help us in any way. The law to which our lives are subject which has brought about this state of affairs has already made our existence a reproach, reduced the world to rubble and ashes, to carnage and destruction. Now our most urgent concern is how to overcome the inner misery and seal off the source of this external chaos.

Christmas is the mystery of contact with God, fundamentally and actually. Those who are part of the approach to it can show us the human requirements which will make it possible for us once more to converse with God, and the conditions necessary if we are to re-establish contact with God.

Three different kinds of approaches are suggested by the Christmas mystery. First, there is the historical sequence of events recalled by the feast; secondly, there is the liturgical reconstruction of the mystery; and third, there is the silent yet eloquent participation of all present. Even the empty places have speech of their own and a message for us all.

Second Reading: Luke 1: 26-35

THOSE ROUND THE CRIB

We are familiar with the crib figures inside the stable or making their way to it. And on that journey to the stable they all have something significant to say to us about the mystery of life and the everyday world. Mary, Joseph, the Angels, the Shepherds, the Wise Men; these are the people gathered around the Child. Let us seek their message and learn their judgment on our own lives.

Third Reading: Let us put aside, for the moment, the venerated figure of the Blessed Virgin as such. It would be impossible to discuss that holy figure in one short paragraph; as "our Lady" she is a theme with an endless and perpetual message. But here let us think of her simply as the young girl, Mary, kneeling humbly before the manger in which lies the child she has just given us. She has her own message, a few words to offer us in the turmoil to which the estrangement between our benighted generation and the divine mystery has thrown us.

The fact that this night of nights brought forth the Light, that Mary kneels before the Christ, that motherhood and the grace of compassion have become a law of our life, that the ice of our inner solitude can be broken and melted by healing warmth, all this became possible because the maid Mary yielded of her own free choice to the inner prompting of God's voice. Her secret is self-surrender and willing acceptance, offering herself to the point of complete obliteration of her personal will.

It never dawns on them -- and there is no reason -- to which order will immediately give allegiance. Are we prepared to provide conditions in which the living contact with God can be re-established? For our lives have become distinct to the point of complete vacuity. God is no longer with us in the commonplace sense of the word. Not in doubt, ignored, excluded from every crisis or have a place in our daily life. We have erased Him out of our lives, we believe as if we no longer need God, and what is worse, we have actually become the capital of being God-conscious. It is a terrible crime to say about this modern world but as far as I can see it is true. We don't even have to look very far for proof of it -- there is sufficient evidence in the things that are happening every day, and please harvest at the roots of the world will not help us in any way. The law by which our lives are ordered which has brought about this state of affairs has already made our existence a reproach, reduced the world to rubble and ashes, to carnage and destruction. For one much urgent concern is how to overcome the inner misery and heal off the source of this external chaos.

Christmas is the mystery of contact with God, Godlessness and unreality. Those who are part of the approach to it can show us the Divine consciousness which will make it possible for us once more to exchange with God, and the conditions necessary if we are to re-establish contact with God.

There different kinds of approaches are suggested by the Christmas mystery. First, there is the historical sequence of events recalled by the Church annually, there is the liturgical reconstruction of the mystery and drama, there is the ritual yet elaborate presentation of all presents. Even the simple place have speaks of their own and a language for us all.

Second Reading: Luke 1: 26-38

THINGS RUNNING TOO FAST

We are familiar with the rich figures inside the stable or maybe those may be it. And on that journey to the stable they all have something to edge forward to say to us about the mystery of life and the everyday world. Mary, Joseph, the Angels, the Shepherds, the Wise Men: these are the people centered around the Child. Let us seek their meanings and learn what lesson on our own lives.

Third Reading: Let us put aside, for the moment, the venerated figures of the blessed Virgin as such. It would be impossible to discuss that lady figure in one short paragraph; as "Our Lady" she is a theme with an endless and practical message. Let us think of her simply as the young girl, Mary, kneeling humbly before the angelic messenger whose the child she has just given us. The lion has one message, a few words to offer us the theme to which the entanglement between our beautiful generation and the divine mystery has thrown us.

The fact that this night of nights brought forth the light, that Mary knelt before the Christ, that motherhood and the grace of consecration have become a fact of our life, that the joy of our inner solitude can be broken and mutual by healing words, all this become possible because the world Mary visited had been free enough to the inner prompting of God's voice. Her response is self-surrender and willing acceptance, effected by her act of the act of complete obliteration of her personal will.

That is both the message and the judgment of us. As a generation we are completely wrapped up in ourselves; we are always concerned with our self-fulfillment, our self-realization, our living conditions, and so on. Everything is organized for our self-gratification. And precisely because of this we are getting progressively poorer and more miserable. Mary's decision was complete surrender to God, and it is the only thing that can lead to human fulfillment. Hers is the decision that obeys the law of life.

Discussion/Meditation: (Where have you been obedient/needed to be obedient but rejected it?)

MATT. 1:18-23, LUKE 2:1-7

Fourth Reading: Joseph - He is the man on the outskirts, standing in the shadows, quietly waiting, there when wanted and always ready to help. He is the man in whose life God is constantly intervening with warnings and visions. Without complaint he allows his own plans to be set aside. His life is a succession of prophecies and dream messages, of packing up and moving on. He is the man who dreams of setting up a quiet household, simply leading a decent home life and going about his affairs, attending to his business and worshipping God, and who, instead, is condemned to a life of wandering. Beset with doubts, heavy-hearted and uneasy in his mind, his whole life disrupted, he has to take to the open road, to make his way through an unfriendly country finding no shelter but a miserable stable for those he holds most dear. He is the one who sets aside all thought of self and shoulders his responsibilities bravely -- and obeys.

His message is willing obedience. He is the person who serves. It never enters his mind to question God's commands; he makes all the necessary preparations and is ready when God calls. Willing unquestioning service is the secret of his life. It is his message for us and his judgment of us. How proud and presumptuous and self sufficient we are! We have crabbed and confined God within the pitiable limits of our obstinacy, our complacency, our opportunism, our mania for"self-expression." We have given God -- and with that everything that is noble and spiritual and holy -- only the minimum of recognition, just as much as would serve to flatter our self-esteem and further our self-will. Just how wrong this is life itself has shown us since in consequence of our attitude we have come to abject bondage which forces the individual to sink his/her identity in the common mass whether he/she wants to or not. The prayer of St. Paul -- do with me what thou wilt -- the quiet readiness to serve of the man Joseph, could lead us to a truer and more genuine freedom.

Discussion/Meditation (What is God asking you to do? What is standing in the way?)

LUKE 2:8-14

Fifth Reading: The Angels - Not the plaster images made by us, but spirits of a higher order of existence identified with freedom, loyalty, wisdom and love. We meet them in the opening scene on the plain of Bethlehem singing hymns of joy and praise. But that is not the mystery or the law they represent -- that is their fruit and reward. They bring tidings, they announce God's mystery and summon the listeners to the adoration from which they themselves have risen. Their mystery is that they represent the afterglow of the divine reality they proclaim.

That is their message and their judgment of us. For a long time there have been no great spirits among us. They have dwindled and died out because gifted people have themselves broken the laws of the spirit. For the last hundred years intellectualism has been obsessed by the glorification of the self, as if truth and reality ought to consider it an honor to be perceived and recognized by such marvelous individuals. Spirit is no longer regarded as the living reflection of a higher life. Perception and awareness now pose as spirit itself. Dozens of prophets kindle new lights each with their own messages, their own ideas, but with no notion of mission or dedication -- that would be an offense against the autocracy and autonomy of genius That is why for a very long time there have been no communications worth listening to. We have had rare messengers of glad tidings singing paeans of praise. When such a voice has been raised publicly it has seemed illusory or has come from agonies of suffering -- an indication of the depths of our soul sickness.

Adoration, perception, proclamation; this is the cycle that represents the life of the spirit. Adoration prepares the soul for perception, since it loosens the tensions and dispels obstacles. The message once perceived enriches the soul, fulfilling its innermost needs and desires, but the proof is in the unfolding of life itself. Let us return to praising God, to proclaiming God joyfully, and then we shall find words that are significant and valuable. We shall see visions again and penetrate mysteries. Insight and decision and the message of the spirit will again become matters of importance, pushing aside the empty show and the bombast of "presentation" which has so much influence today.

Discussion/Meditation (What glad tidings of God's presence in your life are you able to share?)

Sixth Reading: Luke 2:15-18

Seventh Reading: The Shepherds - They are symbols of a type. That they happened to be shepherds is unimportant -- they might equally have been farmers or hedge-crawling tramps who spend their nights in the open. But they had to be people capable of registering wonder, so I very much doubt whether they could have been the products of this mechanical age. They had to be people whose hearts still warmed to the recollection of the old promises. People, therefore, whose lives still had wide horizons from which the light of intuition and a thousand forebodings of spiritual realities were not excluded. People who were still able to believe in miracles. People upright and healthy enough to accept facts as facts, even when the mathematical calculations and the results of their experiments pointed to the contrary. Their secret lay in their purity of heart; their lively wakefulness of soul, their instant readiness to respond to the call. And underneath all this lay the fact that their lives still held desire and expectation; they longed for the fulfillment of the promises they remembered and implicitely believed.

That is their message for us and the standard they judge us by. As a type, people like these simple shepherds no longer exist. I am not referring to the profession or occupation, but simply to their character, to that wakeful readiness to accept miracles, that genuine inner prompting which altogether overshadowed self. The astonishing instinctive confidence which expects a miracle springs from the inner relationship between the yearning of humanity and the promises of God. The type is no longer with us. The world is full of miracles

What is God's message and God's judgment of us. For a long time the churches have an great public prophetic ministry. They have dwindled and died out because political people have abandoned the law of the prophets. For the last hundred years Christianity has been dominated by the glorification of the public, or of truth and reality might to consider it an honor to be uncovered and accompanied by much marvelous individuals. Spirit is no longer regarded as the living reflection of a higher life. Perception and awareness are seen as public issues. Dreams of prophets hundle may liquid each with their own messages, their own ideas, but with no bottom of reason or declaration -- that would be an offense against the autocracy and autonomy of genius.

What is why for a very long time there have been no commandments which liberating us. We have had rare messengers of glad tidings showing reasons of praise. When such a prophet has been raised publicly it has received allmost no has come from spaniel of anything -- an indication of the danger of our solitudeness.

Morsation, paradoxes, proclamations: this is the voice that represents the life of the public. Morsation prepares the soul for perception, shows it lessons the paradoxes and liberate absolute. The message once perceived awakens the soul. Reality the innermost needs and desires, but the proof is in the wholeness of life itself. Let us return to problem God, to problem bad invisibly, and then we shall find words that are steadfast and valuable. We shall see visions again and penetrate mysteries. Insight and desation and the message of the spirit will again become symbols of importance, pointing to the empty alum and the homeland of "presence" which has so much significance today.

Observation/Application (What glad tidings of God's presence is in your life are you able to share?)

Sixth Reading: Luke 2:8-18

Seventh Reading: The Shepherds - They are symbols of a type. That they happened to be shepherds the prophecy -- they public usually have been persons of lodge-wandering people who spend their nights in the open. That they had to people capable of negotiating wonder, so I very much doubt whether they would have been the products of this mechanical age. They had to be people whose hearts still turned to the revelation of the old promises. People innocence, whose lives still had wide horizons for which the light of tradition and a thousand foreboding of mystical realities were not artificial. People who were still able to believe in miracles. People upright and healthy enough to recognize hearts as hearts, even when the mathematical calculations and the results of their scientific-minded guided to the contrary. Which accept joy in their nearly of hearts, their lively relationships of soul, their elegant readiness to response to the call. And underneath all this lay the fact that their lives still held marvels and wonderfulness they longed for the fulfillment of the promises they remembered and implicitly believed.

What is their message for us and the standard they judge us by. As a type, people like these simply disappear no longer exist. Them not referring to the reclamation or recognition, but simply to their place here. In this modern manner to accept mystery, that genuine hunger perceptions which alternative overshadowed self. The automatic transformative conditions which attempts a miracle replace from the hunger relationship between the vacuity of humanity and the presence of God. The type is no longer with us. The world is full of miracles

but no one sees them; our eyes have lost the power to perceive them. God's messengers would take a hand in our affairs more frequently if only our hearts could recapture the rhythm that calls them forth. Of all the messages, this is the most difficult to accept. We find it hard to believe that people of active faith no longer exist. If we can revive faith in all its strength this whole world will change.

Meditation/Discussion: (How can you make your faith more active, more vital -- more real.)

Eighth Reading: Matthew 2:1-10

Ninth Reading: "The Journey of the Magi" T.S. Eliot

Tenth Reading: The Wise Men - Whether they were really kings or just local eastern chieftains or learned astronoerms is not in the least important. Their hearts were filled with wisdom and the aspirations of their people, and that is what really concerns us. Only those people of the highest type could have undertaken such a journey for such a purpose. They brought all the longing of their nations with them to the place of the encounter for its fulfilment. Through the desert by way of royal palaces, the libraries of the learned, and the counsel chambers of the priests -- and they ended their journey at last at a manger in a poor stable.

Here again we have a distinct type. The secret of these people is as plain to us as is the case of the shepherds. They are people with clear eyes that probe things to their very depths. They have a real hunger and thirst for knowledge. I know what that means now. They are capable of arriving at right decisions. They subordinate their lives to the end in view and they willingly journey to the ends of the earth in quest of knowledge, following a star, a sign, obeying an inner voice that would never have made itself heard but for their hunger and the intense alertness that hunger produces. Such people are regal in every impulse; they can rise above every situation even when it involves great suffering. The compelling earnestness of their quest, the unshakeable persistence of their search, the royal gradueur of their dedication -- these are their secrets.

And it is their message for us and their judgment of us. Why do so few ever see the star? Only because so few are looking for it. People often resolve to do things and then trivial, more pressing preoccupations get in the way. At the time of the nativity the world had already been under firm control for a thousand years. Everything was well organized and things were getting better every day! We have been saying this for so long nowadays that our middle-class complacency has become sated with banal truisms and at last is forcing us to ask a few questions. But we are still at the perplexed and puzzled and frustrated stage; we have not yet reached the point where these questions set up a sense of inner compulsion and urgency. The star which could light the way is still invisible to our half-closed eyes.

What are we looking for anyway? And where will be find a genuine yearning so strong that neither fatigue, nor distance, nor fear of the unknown nor loneliness nor ridicule will deter us? Only such a passionate desire can prompt the persistence which is content to kneel even when the ultimate goal turns out to be a simple stable. Those capable of such dedication penetrate to the heart of things and understand

but no one seen them; nor even have lost the power to perceive them. God's messengers would take a hand in our affairs more frequently if only our hearts could receive the system that calls them forth. Of all the messages, this is the most difficult to accept. We find it hard to believe that people of faith faith no longer exist. If we can revive faith in all the approach this whole world will change.

Meditation/Discussion: How can you make your faith more active, more vital -- more real?

Night Reading: Matthew 2:1910

Morn Reading: "The Journey of the Magi" T.S. Eliot

Noon Reading: The Wise Men - Whether they were really kings or just local sages chieftains or learned astronomers is not in the least important. Their hearts were filled with wisdom and the qualities of their people, and that is what really concerns us. Only those people of the highest type could have undertaken such a journey for such a purpose. They brought all the hopes of their nations with them to the place of the announced for the birthing. Through the dusty by way of royal palaces, the libraries of the learned, and the command chambers of the priests -- and they ended their journey at last at a manger in a poor stable.

Here again we have a distinct type. The secret of these people is as plain as as the face of the shepherds. They are people with clear eyes that people things to their very depths. They have a real hunger and thirst for knowledge. I know what that means now. They are capable of acting on right instructions. They subordinate their lives to the and in what and they willingly journey to the ends of the earth in quest of knowledge. Following a star, a star, obeying an inner voice that would never have made itself heard but for their hunger and the intense alertness that hunger produces. Such people are regal in every longitude; they can rise above every attraction even when it involves great suffering. The consciousness of their quest, the unmistakable peculiarities of their search, the royal grandeur of their dedication -- these are their secrets.

And it is their message for us and their judgment of us. Why do so few ever see the star? Only because so few are looking for it. People often reasoning to the things and then trivial, more pressing preoccupations got in the way. At the time of the nativity the world had already been under Pax conducted for a thousand years. Everything was well organized and things were quietly better every day. It have been easy indeed for so long nowhere that our middle-class complacency has become acted with usual routine and it last it focusing us to ask a few questions. But we are still at the perplexed and puzzled and frustrated stage; we have not yet reached the point where questions act up a sense of inner complaint and opposition. The star which could light the way is still invisible to our half-closed eyes.

What are we looking for anyway. And where will he find a genuine yearning so strong that nothing takes place, nor distances, nor fear of the unknown but indifferent will deter us? Only such a passionate desire can prompt the persistence which is content to travel even when the ultimate goal brings out to be a simple stable. Those capable of such dedication penetrate to the heart of things and understand

things and understand why that should be the outcome. A thousand secret longings of the spirit and the heart have paved the way for faith and sanctified them for the act of adoration.

Meditation/Discussion (What are you looking for? Would you settle for finding it in a stable?)

Final
Closing Prayer

The Prison Meditations of Father Delp, Alfred Delp, S.J., (with introduction by Thomas Merton) MacMillan, N.Y., 1963.

ADVENT MEDITATIONS

The Third Week of Advent

OPENING PRAYER

The People Who Are Not at the Crib - Even those who are not there have a message for us and a judgment to give if only to make us realize what it is that keeps usseparated from God. After all, as a people today we are not at the crib either. Yet the emotions aroused by much that we are living through ought certainly to make us want to be there.

Those who were not there include the powerful, the wealthy and the learned leaders of the synogogue -- that is, the powerful heads of the established church.
Matthew 2:16-23
The Powerful - Neither the Roman procurator nor the recognized native rulers made their appearance at the crib to receive ratification of their power. Power can only be genuine and good when it is rooted in the divine. These people possessed power in their own right and used it only to further their own ends. Theirs is the mystery of power. Those who possess power have the implicit duty -- and the opportunity -- to serve as God's deputies. The French, more realistic than we, have two different words, force and puissance (power/strength,power over vs. power to) Puissance conveys the awe inspiring impression of inner power. Power in itself and as the sum total of all the means of enforcing it becomes destructive in the hands of arrogant totalitarian authority and ruins both the one who wields it and the subjects on whom it is exercised. The tyrant in possession of such power is no longer capable of spiritual sensitivity. Tyrants are suspicious of everything that does not fit into the narrow limits of permitted and regulated expression. There was no paragraph in the rules at Jerusalem covering the birth of the child at Bethlehem. Hence the reaction of perplexity and fear and the prompt recourse to the sword. In circumstances like these the subject beings grow timid and cowardly; they accept that their claim to life is cut to the basic minimum of official permission.

Dare we ignore this message and judgment? The history of power in the Western world is onelong story of ruthless force. There is no room in it for the glory of God which is neither safeguarded nor respected. The great are concerned only with their own importance and spend their lives jockeying for position. And the consequences, as far as they concern humanity as a whole are only too obvious. Fear has become a cardinal virtue. This is not said in a spirit of anarchy. But power must regain its proper dimension, allying itself with eternal purpose and genuine mission. Otherwise it will merely evoke counter-action and the ghastly struggle for survival will never end. And as subordinate beings humans must waken to the inherent sovereignty of their spirits, believing in conscience and their relationships with God.

Meditation/Discussion: How does "power over" control you life and keep you from being what God wants you to be?

Reading: Luke 4:18-19

The Wealthy - There is nothing wrong in having great possessions. But when our possessions rob us of our freedom and make us slaves then they become evil. It was like this at the time of the Nativity, and the palaces and fine houses were not destined to shelter the Lord. Great possessions can and should be a blessing. But the owners of treasure are also people who are afraid of any order of things not

covered by the official records. It is so now and it was so then -- Our Lord's words on the subject are well known.

A great many hasty judgments have been made in this connection and much prejudice has been based on them -- Marxist socialism, the condemnation of private ownership, and so on. We must keep a sense of proportion. All the same it is clear that the unsolved problem of wealth, of unearned income and so on is one of the themes of our time. In the last century control passed from the hands of the wise and these burning questions no longer came up against the moderating influence of tolerance, wisdom and a sense of duty. Evils that were dealt with by the materialistic society of the nineteenth century were at the mercy of self-interest, expediency, indignation. The highest ideals were lacking and there was palpably no trace of that spiritual attitude based on the divine nature that makes us all free. So it is not surprising that ordinary people's spiritual mechanism has rusted and become practically useless. Therefore those endowed with great possessions cannot be found in the devout circle around the crib. Some are absent because their possessions have robbed them of proper insight, others because the things they covet have made them incapable of any other interest. It is undeniable that every human being is entitled to a living space, daily bread and the protection of the law as a common birthright; these are fundamentals and should not be handed out as an act of charity.

Meditation/Discussion (In what ways do your belongings or search for money keep you from truly ~~living out~~ your faith?)

4th Reading The Learned - Great learning and prayer have little in common. It was so then and is still so today. Learning is besotted and bemused by the brilliance of its own ideas and has an overweeningly high opinion of its own interpretation of the world's affairs. And whenever the world takes a course not laid down in the books it is immediately suspect.

Western thought is inordinately proud of having "grown up" in the last century. It considers itself completely adult and self-possessed. Meanwhile in obedience to its own law it is no longer spreading its wings like an eagle, no longer adventuring to the horizon. It has become a mere appendage to earthbound utility blind and blunted to certain aspects of truth. But human nature is so constituted that even in its most debased and blinded state it still needs to ape God and set itself on a pedestal as if it were divine. Unconsciously it is reaching out towards a state it might be capable of achieving if it were not so in love with itself and forever leading itself and its world into the icy mire of materialism.

No, the learned are not found among those devout souls kneeling round the crib in the stable. They are the types whom later, when Jesus was grown, the Child was to embrace in the lament "Woe, Woe"; but then they did not understand that either. The wise men, those whose prescience came from the heart, knew where they were going and the goal they were looking for. They were capable of adoration.

The thoroughly learned today cannot be bothered with prayer. Should their thoughts ever wander in the direction of the crib they would surround it with signs and symbols, propaganda slogans, culture jargon and so on. They overlook the simple unquestionable truths God has laid down. Clearly the whole destiny of the West is tied up with this problem. A glance into our schools and universities should suffice to prove that the problem of destiny is unsolved.

Meditation/Discussion (Can you sort out what you have been taught from what you know to be real for you? How does your "education" stand in the way of your faith?)

conceived by the artificial procedure. It is in vain and it was so then -- Our Lord's words on the subject are well known.

A great many hasty judgments have been made in this connection and much prejudice has been based on them -- Lavish entertaining, the condemnation of private ownership and so on. We must keep a sense of proportion. It is the same in other ages the Medieval problem of wealth, of monarchical income and so on. In the age of the Fathers of our time. In the last century monkish ascetic the lands of wheat and there begging questions no longer come in important the moderating influence of tolerance, wisdom and a sense of duty. While what were dealt with by the ecclesiastic authority of the ninetenth century were at the mercy of self-interest, ignorance, fanaticism, the highest ideals were lacking and there was malady on issues of that spiritual character based on the divine nature that makes us all free. So it is not surprising that ordinary mortals spiritual mechanism has cracked and become practically useless. Therefore there ensued with great consequences cannot be found in the development around the cycle. Some are absent because their nonsensicals have coined them, or proper insight, others because the things they never have made them incapable of any other interest. It is undeniable that every house being is entitled to a living space, daily bread and the protection of the law as a common citizenship. These are fundamentals and should not be handed out as an act of charity.

Luke 4:18-19

(Do that mean do you polemically or secretly for money
Meditation/discussion Deep you from daily living and work safely?)

The Learning - Great learning and prayer have little in common. It was so then and is still so today. Learning is benumbed and benighted by the self-importance of its own ideas and has an overwhelmingly high opinion of its own interpretation of the world's affairs. And whenever the world takes a course not laid down in the books it is immediately suspect.

Western thought is inordinately proud of having "woken up" in the last centuries. It considers itself completely adult and self-possessed. Insanity is ophthalmos to the eye but it is an honor appealing its judge like an angle, no longer advancing to the benison. It has become a mere appendage to emotional utility blind and blunted to certain aspects of truth. And human nature is no exception that even in its most debased and blighted state it still needs to ape God and not regard as a mechanical as it is its very dignity. Incomprehensibly it is reaching out towards a power which be capable of relieving it it more not so in love with itself and discover leading itself and its world into the day mine of materialism.

No, the learned are not found among those devout souls looking round the cosmos in the stable. They are the women when later, when some are young, the world was in advance in the lesson "due", lowly, but then they did not understand that without the wise men, those whose pronouncements came from the heart, long where they were going and the road they were looking for. They were capable of adoration.

Thoughtfully learned today cannot be believed with prayer. Should their conclusions under the direction of the world they would succumb to what signs and portents, propaganda slogans, culture lagged and so on. They overlook the change unquestionably in the old has held down. Clearly the whole destiny of the West is tied up with this problem. A glance into our history and universities should evidence to prove that the problem of destiny is involved.

Meditation/discussion - Can you point out where you have been taught from what you learn to be real for you? Do does your "education" stand in the way of your faith?

5th Reading The Established Church - The synagogue had no part in the adoration at the manger. The synogogue was in fact one-track minded: it had an expectation and had no time or attention for anything except that clear-cut idea and its hoped-for realization. The books had even foretold that Bethlehem was the place where that realization would come to pass, yet so completely were the priests shrouded in their own shriveled ideas that their senses had become numbed and that numbness prevented their recognizing the signs of their time. No star pointed the way for them, no gleam of intuition lightened their darkness. They were bemused by their own self-sufficiency and heard nothing of the angels' song.

If only this were merely a tale to point a moral. But it is the plain truth; it really happened. The new spirit of Creation flows without interruption through the new Church -- but how much force it requires to achieve its purpose. The officers of the Church have the inner guidance of the Spirit -- but what about the executive departments? And the beaurocratic officials? And the mechanical "believers" who "believe" in everything, in every ceremony, every ritual -- but know nothing whatever about the living God? One has to be very careful in formulating this thought, not from cowardice but because the subject is so awe-inspiring. One thinks of all the meaningless attitudes and gestures -- in the name of God? No, in the name of habit, of tradition, custom, convenience, safety and even -- let us be honest -- in the name of middle-class respectability which is perhaps the very least suitable vehicle for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit will go on pouring forth and bringing about its work of renewal but things might have worked more smoothly if there had been no rift, no quarrels, no secession, defamation and suspicion, if the Spirit had founding living organs to work through instead of withered officials. And the obstacles are still there. Creative theology, spiritually conscious worshippers, active, effective love have yet to be achieved. Let us go back to the genuine contact and learn its laws once more; let us regain the capacity to see visions and know intuitively, moved by the Spirit. Let us give free rein to the divine instinct with which we are endowed and climb out of this morass in which we are bogged, emerge from this trance of false security. Then we shall discover the real efficacy of prayer and its power to bless and to heal.

MEDITATION/Discussion (How does "ritual", "rite" or "churchiness" stand in the way of your faith?)

6th Reading The Crux of the Matter - Now I ought to sum all this up in a pattern of behavior towards which we could be educated so that we can be capable of knowing God once more. But I am desperately short of time. I can hear the jailer already coming down the passage and besides I have no more paper. So the friend for whom these lines are intended, and any others who may one day chance to read them, will have to gather up the ends for themselves. But one thing must be said. I shall be accused of being concerned only with the "natural" life of human beings. I will not attempt to deny or disguise the fact. But God's kindness appeared in one of the Christmas messages. Without a minimum of sound humanity, genuine human dignity, and human culture, no one is capable of making contact with God. We are not even capable of ordinary understanding and behavior.

I am perfectly aware that only extraordinary grace can reawaken us and heal us; I also know that the divine impulse is forever prompting us, yearning to be allowed to do its healing work. To proclaim this is the task of those among us who still have perception and know it for the truth.

The Established Church - The monastery had no part in the adoration of the manger. The monastery was in fact one-track minded: it had an expectation and had no time or attention for anything except that clear-cut idea and its longed-for realization. The monks had even forgotten that individuals was the place where that realization would come to pass, yet so completely were the prelates absorbed in their one minded idea that their answer had become muted and that unknown presented their recognition the object of their time. In other words the very fur-clad plan of inclusion lightened their darkness. They were consumed by their own self-sufficiency and heard nothing of the angelic song.

If only this were merely a tale to point a moral. But it is the plain truth is sadly happened. The new spirit of Christian Time without interruption through the ivy through -- but how much force it requires to achieve its purpose. The difference of the Church have the inner guidance of the Spirit -- but what about the exterior dispensation? And the hierarchic official? And the mechanical "believers" who "attend" in conformity, in every ceremony, every ritual -- but know nothing whatever about the Living God? One has to be very careful in formulating this sin, or just come remarks but impose the subject to an ex-thought. The things of all the meaningless activities and gestures -- in the name of God. So, in the name of habit, of tradition, custom, convenience, society and even -- let us be honest -- in the name of mutual-alone responsibility which is perhaps the very least suitable vehicle for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit will go on pouring forth and bringing about the work of renewal but things might have reached more smoothly if there had been no gift, no pure gift, no surprise, deterioration and suspicion, if the Spirit had found living organs to work through instead of withered officials. And the observer are right there. Creative charisma, spiritually conscious development, motive, effective love have yet to be believed. Let us go back to the Jerusalem conclave and learn the lessons there; let us regain the capacity to see visions and hear intuitively, moved by the spirit. Let us give free rein to the divine instinct which we are endowed and cliche out of bitterness in which we are hedged, emerge from this trance of fakes reality. Then we shall discover the real efficacy of prayer and its power to bless and to heal.

(How does "ritual", "office" or "churchiness" stand in
INSTITUTIONAL recognition the way of your faith?)

The Cost of the Manger - Now I ought to sum all this up in a pattern of behavior towards which we could be educated so that we can be capable of knowing God once more. But I am desperately short of time. I can hear the jeering already coming down the passage and leading I have no more paper. To the friend for whom Liliana are intended, and any others who may one day chance to read them, will have to rather up the ante for themselves. But one thing must be said. I shall be accused of being concerned only with the "unusual" life of human beings. I will not attempt to deny or distort this fact. But Godly Holiness appeared in one of the ordinary messages. Without a outlook of mutual humanity, practice human dignity, and human relations, no one is capable of making contact with God. We are not even capable of ordinary understanding and behavior.

I am perfectly aware that only extraordinary grace can reconcile us and heal us; I also know that the divine impulse is forever prompting us, urging us to be allowed to do the healing work. To proclaim this is the task of those among us who still have perception and hope it for the truth.

Third Week of Advent - 4

But we will not be denied God's mercy is the law of our salvation. But the main task is to render us capable and willing for the Spirit to do its work. This is even more urgent than the proclamation of the central mystery, for no one can understand this anyway until we have surrendered and opened our hearts to the will of God within us. So it may be that even this shambles in which we now live, this devastation swept by bitter winds of fate, is the destined place and hour of a new holy night, a new birth for humanity seeking God, a new nativity. Darkness shall not frighten us or distress wear us out; we will go on waiting, watching and praying until the star arises.

Meditation/Prayer (Can you dedicate yourself to not letting anything get between you and God?)

Closing Reading: ISAIAH 55:1-13

The Prison Meditations of Father Delp, Alfred Delp, S.J. (with Introduction by Thomas Merton) MacMillan, New York, 1963.

The Fourth Week of Advent

MEDITATIONS ON THE VIGIL OF CHRISTMAS

(An excerpt from Father Delp's diary: December 28th: In the course of these last long weeks life has become suddenly much less rigid. A great deal that was once quite simple and ordinary seems to have taken on a new dimension. Things seem clearer and at the same time more profound; one sees all sorts of unexpected angles. And above all God has become almost tangible. Things I have always known and believed now seem so concrete; I believe them but I also live them.

For instance how I used to mouth the words "hope" and "trust". I know now that I used them uncomprehending, like a child. And in doing so I deprived my life of much fruitfulness and achievement, and I also cheated others of many substantial blessings because I was incapable of taking really seriously God's command that we should trust absolutely and wholeheartedly in God. Only one who really believes and hopes and trusts can form any idea of humanity's real status or catch a glimpse of the divine perspective.) He was executed on January 8th.

There has always been a lot of misunderstanding about the feast of the nativity. Superficial familiarity, sentimental creche-making and so on have to some extent distorted our view of the stupendous event the feast commemorates.

The events of history in the past few years have brought home the harsh realities of life as never before. The temptation to make an idyllic myth of Christmas are less in evidence than before. Many who have spent Christmas in dugouts and foxholes that would make the stable at Bethlehem seem cozy by comparison will have little inclination to glamorize the ox and ass. They maya even stumble on the idea of asking themselves what really happened that holy night -- was the world made a better, more beautiful place? Did life acquire a blessing because the angels sang Gloria in excelsis, because the shepherds were astounded and hurried to pay homage, because a king lost his nerve and ordered innocent children to be massacred? Yet at this point the questions have already started to run wild -- for this crime took place simply and solely because it was the holy night.

Yet Christians probably never pray more fervently than when they offer up the respirare at the conclusion of the Vigil. We breathe again because the birth of the Only-Begotten will, we trust, ease our burdens. A load has been lifted from our hearts. Life takes on a new meaning because a new perspective has been disclosed, because the decisive moment has been reached again, because the relative security we normally count on has not yet been swallowed up by the uncertainties of abnormal times.

To breathe again - To be honest, I long to be able to breathe again, to be relieved of my troubles. How earnestly I prayed the prayer for speedy deliverance in yesterday's Mass. Each day I have to steel myself for the hours of daylight and each night for the hours of darkness. In between I often kneel or sit before my silent Host and talk over with him the circumstances in which I am. Without this constant contact I should have despaired long ago.

MEDITATIONS ON THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS

(An excerpt from Father Delp's diary. December 1944. In this course of these last long weeks life has become suddenly much less vivid. I guess that was once quite simple and ordinary among us have taken on a new dimension. Things seem clearer and at the same time more profound; one sees all sorts of unsuspected angles. And above all God has become almost tangible. Things I have always known and believed now seem so concrete; I believe them but I also like them.

For instance here I used to mouth the words "Hope" and "Trust". I knew now that I need them unconditionally. Like a child. And in doing so I developed my life of much fruitfulness and achievement, and I also discovered others of very substantial blessings because I was incapable of making terrible mistakes by not a command that we should trust absolutely and unhesitatingly in God. Only one who really believes and hopes and trusts can form any idea of Immanuel's real status or catch a glimpse of the divine perspective. He was incarnated on January 6th.

There has always been a lot of misunderstanding about the Feast of the Nativity. Superficial familiarity, sentimental crooning-making and so on have to some extent distorted our view of the stupendous event the feast commemorates.

The events of history in the past few years have brought home the harsh realities of life as never before. The temptation to make an idyllic myth of Christmas are less in evidence than before. Many who have spent Christmas in dugouts and foxholes that would make the stable at Bethlehem seem cosy by comparison will have little inclination to sentimentalize the old yarn. They have even sensible on the idea of making Christmas what really happened that holy night -- use the world made a better, more beautiful place? Did life appear a blessing because the angels sang *Gloria in excelsis*, because the shepherds were astounded and hurried to pay homage, because a baby took life serve and ordered innocent children to be massacred? Yet at this point the questions have already charged to run wild -- for this which makes that place sadly and nightly because it was the holy night.

Not Christians probably never pray more fervently than when they offer up the *Gloria* at the conclusion of the Vigil. We begin again because the level of the Only-Begotten will, we trust, case our burdens. I feel has been lifted from our backs. We're taken on a new meaning because a new perspective has been disclosed, because the decisive moment has been reached again, because the relative responsibility we normally count on has not been swallowed up by the unmeasurables of eternal times.

To breathe again - To be longer, I long to be able to breathe again, to be relieved of my troubles. Now earnestly I prayed the prayer for speedy deliverance in yesterday's vespers. Each day I have to plead myself for the hours of daylight and each night for the hours of darkness. In between I often longed or ask heaven by either look and talk over with the circumstances in which I am. Without this constant contact I should have disappeared long ago.

The question that applies to the whole world applies to me personally and concretely on this feast of the nativity. Is there anything different about celebrating Mass here in this narrow cell where prayers are said and tears are shed and God is known, believed in and called on? At stated hours the key grates in the lock and my wrists are put back into handcuffs; at stated hours they are taken off -- that goes on day after day, monotonously, without variation. Where does the breathing again which God makes possible come in? And the waiting and waiting for relief -- how long? And to what end?

It is necessary to celebrate the feast of the Nativity with great realism, otherwise one's imagination will conjure up magical happenings for which one's sober reason can discover no justification nor prospect. And as a result of that the celebration of the feast could easily lead to bitter disappointment and deep depression. The vigil Mass leads to the necessary restrained, expectant and realistic frame of mind in three ways:

SECOND READING: God whose coming we celebrate is and remains the God of promise - At the introit we pray: This day you shall know -- and in the morning you shall see, clearly referring to the coming feast and the connection between it and the vigil. But it also refers to a perpetual state, to the fundamental condition of our life. It is one of the most tragic and disturbing factors of our existence that we may know a great deal and have vast experience behind us and yet fail to find a place of shelter, a secure refuge. We would so like to regard our acquired knowledge as final, to make ourselves at home here and feel secure. But every now and then we grow uncomfortably aware of the fact that our wanderings are not yet over. Again and again the truth we believe we have grasped proves to be merely a prelude, an overture to something that lies beyond, beckoning and leading us onward. And we must go on, must continue our journey if we are to be given life's reward. To call a halt before the end is reached means death, metaphysical and religious ruin.

This "in the morning you shall see" absorbs the wholesome, creative unrest to which we owe all that is genuinely alive in our own makeup. But at what a price. The Lord calls it hunger and thirst after righteousness and one needs to have experienced the agony of counting hours until the next ration of bread is due really to understand what this means and how much is expected of us in this eternal quest.

And the alternative? Indifference, resignation, insensitivity, loss of appetite, the atrophying of the organs, the loss of our spiritual nerve, overstrain and deadly fatigue -- in short one of those fatal wounds through which the lifeblood of so many human beings nowadays is ebbing away. We may think we can escape the curve of tension into which the law has forced us but in the end we come to realize that burdens are part and parcel of the condition of life.

So now at the threshold of Christmas which we like to approach as though it were a kind of earthly paradise, we come to the same motif: you shall know -- you have received tidings: you shall see -- you must be on your way to find real fulfilment in real encounter. Here again we have real tension, the theme of the bow which can only be stretched when the arrow is applied to it.

The question then applies to the whole world applies to me personally and concretely on this feast of the nativity. In these swirling different about celebrating Mass here in this narrow cell where prayers are said and here are what and God is known, believed in and called out? In stained house the key grates in the lock and my relatives are put back into bandaged or stacked house they are taken off -- that goes on day after day, monotonously, without variation. Where does the breaking again which God makes possible come in? And the nothing and waiting for relief -- how long? And to what end?

It is necessary to celebrate the feast of the Nativity with great realism, otherwise one's imagination will conjure up radical happenings for which one's sober reason can discover no justification nor prospect. And as a result of that the celebration of the feast could easily lead to bitter disappointment and deep depression. The vigil mass leads to the necessary restrained, prepared and realistic frame of mind in three ways:

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45

God whose coming we celebrate is and remains the God of promise - as the Gospel reminds us pray: *"Blessed are you who believe -- and in the morning you shall see*, clearly referring to the coming feast and the connection between it and the vigil. But it also refers to a personal state, to the fundamental condition of our life. It is one of the most tragic and disturbing factors of our existence that we may know a great deal and have vast experience behind us and yet fail to find a place of shelter, a secure refuge. We would so like to regard our acquired knowledge as final, to make ourselves at home here and feel secure. But every now and then we grow uncomfortably aware of the fact that our wanderings are not yet over. Again and again the trail we believe we have grasped proves to be merely a prelude, an overture to something that lies beyond, beckoning and leading us onward. And we must go on, must continue our journey if we are to be given light ahead. To call a halt before the end is reached means death, metaphysical and religious death.

This "in the morning you shall see" absorbs the wholeness, creative unrest to which we are all that is genuinely alive in our own makeup. But at what a price. The load calls it hunger and either sets rightousness and one needs to have experienced the agony of searching hunger until the next station of broad is due really to understand what this means and how much in comparison of us in this eternal quest.

And the alternative? Indifference, contagation, insensitivity, loss of appetite, the atrophying of the organs, the loss of our spiritual nerve, overwhelm and deadly fatigue -- in short one of those fatal wounds through which the lifeblood of so many human beings nowadays is ebbing away. We may think we can escape the curse of tension into which the law has forced us but in the end we come to realize that bredens are part and parcel of the condition of life.

So we at the threshold of christmas which we like to approach as though it were a kind of earthly paradise, we come to the same matter: *you shall know* -- you have received tidings: *you shall see* -- you must be on your way to find real fulfilment in real encounter. Here again we have real tension, the theme of the hour which can only be stated when the screw is applied to it.

We ought to remember that we are approaching the feast of God-made-human, not of humanity rendered divine. The divine mystery takes place on earth and follows that natural course of earthly events. As the epistle so emphatically states: according to the flesh--from the seed of David. It cannot be interpreted any other way. It is an indisputable but incomprehensible fact that God enters our homes, our existence, not only like us but actually as one of us. That is the unfathomable mystery. From this point on the Child is absorbed by history, becomes part of history and shares history's fate. In the darkest cells and the loneliest prisons Christ is there; is met on the high roads and in the lanes. And this is the first blessing of the burden -- Jesus is there to help us bear it. And the second blessing of it is that all we who have to bear it know at once when the strong shoulder is pushed under to relieve the weight. And the third blessing is that since that holy night when divine life and the original pattern of existence was born on earth, strength enabling us to master life has grown from that upsurge of divine vitality in human existence and is reflected in the existence of the community, to which God revealed Godself.

We shall be better able to cope with life's demands if we remain constantly aware of the directions this night provides. Let us continue our journey along the highway of life without allowing ourselves to be deterred or frightened by occasional desolate stretches. A new spirit has entered into us and we will not waver in our belief in the star of the promises or weary of acknowledging the angels Gloria even if we sometimes have tears in our eyes as we join in. Many disasters have been turned into blessings because we have risen above them.

Third Reading: LUKE 4:16-19

Meditation/Discussion (How has God/Jesus shown that there was one present whom you could lean upon in trouble. Do you need to do that leaning now? Why? Can others help you experience that ability to find help when you need it?)

God in the Christmas encounter is still the challenging God - The greatest misconceptions all center on the typical Christmas picture of God. Here too is humanity so wrapped up in appearances that the breathtaking reality of the birth of God as a human child scarcely enters our mind and the soul doesn't grasp its significance. The truth is too tremendous to be appreciated unless one concentrates on it fully. Of course the externals -- the sweetly sentimental pictures, the carols, the creches, and so on are a comfort to humanity as a whole and to the individual. But there is a great deal more to the nativity than that. The comfort we derive from the externals is only the symbol of the far greater gifts this event, and the feast commemorating it, bestowed and continue to bestow on us. Since the birth of our Lord humanity has been confirmed in the hope which turns us to God's throne for grace: God is on our side. But this does not mean that God has dethroned Godself any more than it means that our lives have been turned into a primrose path by that stupendous event.

We need to look critically at this tendency to sentimentalize the divine attributes by personifying them in the person of an innocent child or by over-beautifying the figure of the adult Jesus. The glamorizing of the nativity story, the lowering of the whole tone of Christ's life to the level of a baroque sermon full of portentous warnings and grave moralizings has contributed quite

We ought to remember that we are approaching the feast of God-with-human, not of humanity reached divine. The divine mystery takes place on earth and follows that natural course of earthly events. As the epistle on epiphanically states: according to the flesh-from the seed of David. It cannot be interpreted any other way. It is an indisputable but incomprehensible fact that God endears our humanity, our existence, not only like us but actually as one of us. That is the unfathomable mystery. From this point on the child is absorbed by history, learning part of history and always history's ends. In the daytime world and the lonelinest wilderness dwelled is thereat; in most on the high roads and in the lanes. And this is the first teaching of the Lord -- there is there to help me bear it. And the second teaching of it is that all we who have to bear it know at once when the strong shoulder is placed under to relieve the burden. And the third blessing is that since that holy night divine life and the original pattern of existence are born on earth, strongly enabling us to master life from which spurious of divine vitality in human existence and is realized in the existence of the community, to which God revealed Godself.

We shall be better able to cope with life's demands if we remain unmistakably aware of the discontent this night provides. Let us continue our journey along the highway of life without allowing ourselves to be deceived or frightened by occasional desolate stretches. A negative spirit has entered into us and we will not waver in our belief in the ether of the promises or weary of maintaining the angels unknown even if we sometimes have trace in our eyes as we look in. Many disasters have been turned into blessings because we have risen above them.

Third reading: Luke 4:16-19

Meditation/Ulsenseelsen (How has God/Jesus shown that there was one preaching upon you could lean upon in trouble. Do you need to do that learning now? Why? Can others help you experience that ability to find help when you need it?)

God in the Christmas encounter is still the challenging God - The greatest blessing misconceptions all center on the typical Christmas picture of God. Here too in humanity so wrapped up in appearance that the breathtaking reality of this birth of God as a human child easyously enters our mind and the mind doesn't grasp the significance. The truth is too tremendous to be appreciated unless one concentrates on it fully. Of course the extremals -- the sweetly realistic mental pictures, the parcels, the crackles, and so on are a comfort to innumerably as a whole and to the individual. But there is a great deal more to the centurity than that. The comfort we derive from the extremals is only the symbol of the far greater gifts this event, and the feast commemorating it, bestowed and continue to bestow on us. Since the birth of our Lord humanity has been confirmed in the hope which turns us to God's throne for grace; God is on our side. But this does not mean that God has abandoned Godself and more than it means that our lives have been turned into a pleasure path by that stupendous event.

We need to look critically at this tendency to sentimentalize the divine - attributes by personifying them in the manner of mythmonger child or by overbeautifying the figure of the adult Jesus. The glamorizing of the nativity story, the lowering of the whole tone of Christ's life to the level of a baroque manner full of pretentious verbiage and grave moralizing has contributed quite

a lot to the West's present helplessness in the face of conditions that keep it fettered and restrained. Certainly God became human -- a human being among human beings -- but nevertheless God, creator of all the universe. Therefore we, the created being, must approach this God-made-us with reverence and adoration, subjugating ourselves in order to find ourselves -- it is the only way.

The vigil points out how we ought to approach this feast. Whoever enters into the divine way of life automatically comes under divine guidance. That, as far as the worshipper is concerned, means that the nearer we get to God the more we long to return there for it is essentially a homecoming. God's nearness has dynamic power. As worshippers, we may know by the state of unrest into which we are thrown by this attraction just how much we have grasped of the secret relationship between God and us.

And the vigil further prevents our becoming bemused by the over-glamorized picture of the divine Child by pointing out another fundamental relationship between God and us. The collect reminds us suddenly and unexpectedly that the child in fact is already sitting in judgment over our lives. The increased capacity for life which comes from understanding this warning, the awakened sense of responsibility, remains with us long after Christmas is over provided we have entered the vigil in the proper spirit. And if we remember that the divine Child is already engaged in the serious business of judging the world how many of the people who represent the human race today can honestly approach the crib? Most of them don't even want to. The small and narrow door will not admit those who come riding on a high horse. But simple shepherds have no difficulty in getting through. The star leads the regal wise men to it but the arrogance of Jerusalem is thrown into a panic by the Child. How much there is in our lives today that cannot face the Child. How different our individual lives would be if only we realized that the world's supreme hour struck that midnight when Almighty God condescended to come among us as a little child. We should not behave so greedily, so arrogantly, so highhandedly to one another if we did.

Every hour of our Lord's life from the crib to the Cross by which we were redeemed is a judgment on some part of our existence. That is why we are often so defeated and so in trouble. But the last hour was a resurrection, a glorious homecoming, for both Christ and for us. We ought to take the Christ Child very seriously.

Meditation/Discussion: (Silently think of the things which God is judging in <u>your</u> life in light of Jesus' teachings and life. What can you do to change that? How can you become more obedient to the Word made flesh?)

<u>God whose coming we joyfully await is still the God of judgment</u> - It is no easy or light matter to face the scrutiny of the divine Judge. Obedience to the Word which has to be the basis of our lives increases our responsibility. But even that is not the end. Over and above rules are the entirely personal twists and turns of fate through which God intervenes in the lives of individuals. And so often God seems to leave us alone with our burden to cope with our troubles as best we can.

a lot to the Wise's dreamed helplessness in the face of conditions that long it fostered and benefited. Certainly God became human -- a human being among human beings -- but everything and, crucifer of all the universe. Therefore we, the created being, must approach this God-made-as with reverence and adoration, enlightening ourselves in order to find ourselves -- it is the only way.

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Meditation/Discussion: (Silently think of the things which God is judging in your life in light of Jesus' coming and life. What can you do to change that? How can you become more obedient to the Word made flesh?)

And whose coming we joyfully await is still the God of judgment - it is no more or less matters to face the revelatory of the divine judge. Whatever to the Word which has to be the basis of our lives increases our responsibility, but even that is not the end. Over and above this we are entirely personal beings and bound of this through which God intervenes in the lives of individuals. And so often God seems to leave us alone with our burden to cope with our troubles as best we can.

Fifth Week of Advent - 5

Let us reread the Gospel from a purely human angle -- looking at this episode in their lives from a purely human point of view:

Fourth Reading:

We know how it all ended so it doesn't disturb us, but at the time there must have been a great deal of heartache. Joseph's belief in a trusted human being was shattered -- but what must Mary herself have gone through? She had dedicated herself to God -- her submission was complete and unreserved. She had received the Word in a way no other human being would ever share. And then God became silent. She must have felt society's questioning eyes following her; she must have known the torment Joseph was going through and the blow his sense of justice had received. And God left her alone in this hour with all the weight of her trouble pressing on her. From a purely human point of view what a terrible position to be in.

And what about our own fate? We have heart the promises and believed in the messages and accepted the prophecies. And then something unexpected happens and our life is twisted out of shape -- human life is subject to that sort of thing, even the life of Christians. Ought it to be different in their case? It isn't. And it is precisely when we come up against occurrences like this that our faith is put to the real test. To adhere steadfastly to the Word even when we strike our foot against a stone, even when we feel we are beaten, even when we are fastened in chains and handcuffs -- that is the answer. And that is the answer that will be expected when each of us is questioned at the seat of judgment; no one can escape it. God is posing that very question to us today in a hundred different ways and we have to see to it that we have the right answers. Steadfastness is not an easy virtue to acquire, but it makes us fit to meet our Maker and it opens our eyes to the actual reality of God.

Once we honestly try to acquire it the face of the whole world is changed. The stark features of unavoidable accident, of logical consequence and necessity are softened. The world and life take on a more friendly look -- they seem to assume almost parental compassion. The thousand and one small blessings which God takes delight in showering on humanity begin to reveal God's nearness to us. Outwardly things are just as before and yet something has happened -- there is a new consciousness of God's parental care in those who have stood the test of God's questions. Suddenly we discover that events are not impersonal and universal but that they have more than one meaning. In the personal dialogue between God and us which is the whole point of life, achievements have meanings quite different from those usually attributed to them. And what one person regards as trivial everyday occurrences are to another blessed signs of God's mercy and guidance.

Meditation/Discussion (Out of some difficulty which you may be experiencing, what guidance could God be trying to give you? How, in that problem, could God be speaking to <u>you</u>?)

Fifth Reading: ISAIAH 11:1-10

<u>To breathe again</u> - That brings us back to <u>respirare</u>, the deep breath of relief which can, and should bring ease. Nothing has happened to the world but it is now the ark of God which no storm can overturn, no flood can wreck. Life has not shaken off its laws or lost its tension but the Lord has subdued it, made sense of it all.

Let us reveal the Gospel from a purely human angle -- looking at this episode in Luke's life from a purely human point of view:

Fourth reading:

We know how it all ended so it doesn't disturb us, but at the time there must have been a great deal of bewilderment. Joseph's better life a trusted person being was shattered -- but what must Mary herself have gone through? She had dedicated herself to God -- her submission was complete and unreserved. She had received the Word in a way no other human being would ever share. And then God became silent. She must have felt inexplicable desolation over following her; she must have known the torment, though was going through and the blow his sense of loneliness had received. And God left her alone in this hour with all the weight of her trouble pressing on her. From a purely human point of view what a terrible position to be in.

And what about our own faith? We have heard the promises and believed in the messages and accepted the prophecies. And then something unexpected happens and our life is twisted out of shape -- human life is subject to that sort of thing, even the life of Christians. Might it be in different circumstances? It isn't. And it is precisely when we come up against occurrences like this that our faith is put to the real test. To adhere wholeheartedly to the Word even when we stumble our foot against a stone, even when we feel we have been even when we are fastened in shame and humiliation -- that is the answer. and that is the answer that will be expected when each of us is questioned at the seat of judgement no one can escape it. God is putting that very question to us today in a hundred different ways and we have to see to it that we have the right answers. Standardness is not an easy virtue to acquire, but it makes us fit to meet our Maker and it opens our eyes to the actual reality of God.

Once we honestly try to accept it the face of the whole world is changed. The stark features of unavoidable accident, of logical consequence and necessity are softened. The world and life take on a more friendly look -- they seem to assume almost personal companionship. The thousand and one small blessings which God bestows delight us showering on humanity begin to reveal God's presence to us. Customarily things are just as before and yet something has happened -- there is a new consciousness of God's presence in those who have stood the test of God's questions. Suddenly we discover that events are not impersonal and universal but that they have more that one meaning. In the personal dialogue between God and us which is the whole point of life, autocosmos has meanings quite different from those usually attributed to them. And what one person regards as trivial everyday occurrences are to another blessed signs of God's mercy and goodness.

Meditation/Discussion (Out of some difficulty which you may be experiencing, what guidance could God be trying to give you? How, in that problem, could God be speaking to you?)

Fifth reading: Isaiah 40:1-10

To console Israel - that brings us back to *consolation*, the dear breath of relief which can, and should bring ease. Nothing has happened to the world, but it is now the ark of God which moves unhurriedly, yet steadily on towards. Life has not taken off its time [illegible] published it, made peace of it all.

The very tensions are harnessed now to increase the strength and power of humanity.

And there is one other thing -- we are no longer on our own. Monologue has never been able to make our lives happy and healthy; we are only genuinely alive when we are engaged in dialogue. All mono-tendencies are evil. But by bringing the God-imposed tensions and burdens into the dialogue the most terrible of all human maladies -- loneliness -- is overcome. From that point there are no more starless nights, no more days of solitary confinement, no more lonely paths or pitfalls without companionship or guidance. God with us. That was the promise, that was what we prayed for and cried out for. In God's own way, in the natural course of things, far more simply but also far more effectively than we could ever have imagined, God came to us as our ally.

We must not try to shirk the burdens imposed on us. They are God's way of communicating with us and they are God's blessing. Whever is true to life, however hard and barren it may seem at the moment, will discover within fountains of real refreshment. The world will give you more than you ever imagined possible. The silver threads of God's mystery will begin to sparkle visibly in everything around you and there will be a song in your heart. Your burdens will turn to blessings because you will recognize them a coming from God and welcome them as such.

God becomes human but humanity does not become divine. The human order remains unchanged with the same obligations. But it has acquired a blessing and we have grown in stature, have become stronger, mightier. Let us trust in life because this night will pass and a new day will dawn. Let us trust in life because we do not have to live through it alone. God is with us.

Meditation/Discussion (What are some of ways you are aware that God is with you? Can you share with each other some of the experiences when God's presence has been made manifest to you?)

Final Reading: Luke 2:1-19

Closing Prayer

The very Sacraments are bestowed now to increase the strength and power of humanity.

And there is one other thing -- we are no longer on our own. Nonsense has never been able to make our lives happy and healthy; we are only genuinely alive when we are engaged in dialogue. All mono-tendencies are evil. But by bringing the God-imposed Sacraments and burdens into the dialogue the most terrible of all human maladies -- loneliness -- is overcome. From that point there are no more mountains to climb, no more days of military encampment, no more lonely paths or pitfalls without companionship or guidance. God with us. That was the promise. That was what we prayed for and called out for. In God's own way, in the natural course of things, for more simply but also far more effectively than we could ever have imagined, God came to be as our ally.

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God becomes human but humanity does not become divine. The human order remains unchanged with the same obligations. But it has acquired a blessing and we have grown in stature, have become stronger, wiser. Let us travel in life because tide might will pass and a new day will dawn. Let us travel in life because we do not have to live through it alone. God is with us.

Meditation/Discussion (What are some of ways you are aware that God is with you? Can you share with each other some of the experiences when God's presence has been made manifest to you?)

Final Reading: Luke 2:1-7

Closing Prayer

ADVENT MEDITATIONS

This series of Advent meditations came about accidentally. We were looking for a series of Advent studies very much like the Lenten groups which MCC churches have been doing for some time. One day I picked up a little book in a drugstore and was stopped in my tracks. There was something mystical and deeply touching about the Advent meditations of a Jesuit priest awaiting execution in Nazi Germany. But more than that, there was something that he was saying to every oppressed person caught in a political system that was not cognizant of our essential humanity. Father Delp cared about people caught in the system because suddenly and for no real reason except his love for Christ and his religious order he was one of us, and he reacted to that realization with love, both for the oppressed and for his oppressor.

We used the meditations at Providence, Rhode Island, interspersing them with Scripture readings and periods of discussion about the personages, the ideas, and our own lives. They took on real meaning for us and we were able to deepen our faith, and come to a deeper understanding of the Christmas story.

In that spirit, we would like to share these with other MCC's. There are four sessions outlined, the first carries with it an introduction to the material and to Father Delp. This introduction is adapted from the Introduction to the book by Thomas Merton and should be read either before the first session or at the first session.

The first session introduces three figures: The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness Make Straight the Way of the Lord, the Herald Angel, and Mary. Accompanying Father Delp's meditation on each of these figures is appropriate scripture. A time is provided for silent meditation and then time to discuss the ideas which Father Delp and/or the Scripture arouses. An appropriate Carol or Hymn might also be included, if your group would like.

The second session introduces and discusses the figures around the creche: Mary, Joseph, the Angels, the Shepherds, the Wise Men. Father Delp links those symbolic figures with people in our own lives -- giving each of them a message and a judgment of us. Accompanying the meditations again are the Scripture passages which correspond to the meditations, and periods of silent meditation and discussion are again provided. Hymns or taped music might well accompany the meditation time.

The third discussion centers around <u>those not at the crib</u> and their reasons for not being there, and relates them to the modern world and its problems of government, economics and education. Father Delp knew the world of the 1940's -- and much of what he said then applies today. Again, scripture passages and time for silent meditation and discussion are provided.

The fourth session centers on the Vigil of Christmas and looks at the immanence of God in the figure of the Christ Child -- Immanuel -- God with us. Again, there is accompanying scripture and time for meditation and discussion.

The first three meditations call us to an accounting, speak to our human condition, and try to reach us through hearts that have grown cold to the message of the ages. The fourth and final meditation gives us hope that God, indeed, is with us and tells us that there is <u>real</u> refreshment for our souls in the Christmas message.

ADVENT MEDITATION

While series of Advent meditations come about accidentally. We were looking for a series of Advent studies very much like the Lenten groups which we discussed here last during Lent. One day I picked up a little book in a drugstore and was chopped in my tracks. There was something mystical and deeply thoughtful about the Advent meditations of a Jesuit priest associated with resistance in West Germany. But more than that, there was something that we were trying to every oppressed person wrought in a political system that did not comprehend of our ecclesiastical humanity. Rather talk sound about people caught in the system learning suddenly and for the real reason concept his love for God and his religious order because one of us, and he reached to that realization with love, both for God experience and the Spirit experience.

We used the meditations at Crowhaven, Whole Island, interspersing them with Christian readings and periods of discussion about the personnaire, the ideas, and our own lives. They took on real meaning for us and we were able to deepen our faith, and come to a deeper understanding of the Christmas story.

In that spirit, we would like to share these with other people. There are four meditations included, the first question with it an introduction to the material and to another help. With introduction is adapted from the introduction in the book by Father Avelin and should be read either before the first session or at the first session.

The first session introduces Advent themes. The Value of one Trying in the Middleness Under Scrutiny the Use of the Jewish the Special Angel, and Mary. Accompanying Father Avelin's meditation on each of these figures is appropriate scripture. Time is provided for silent meditation and then time to discuss the ideas which Father Avelin studies the Christmas message. An appropriate Psalm or Hymn may also be included, if your group would like.

The second session introduces and discusses the figures around the cradle: Joseph, Joseph, the Angels, the Shepherds, the Wise Men. Father Avelin gives symbolic figures with people in our own times -- giving each or them a message and a job. each of us. Accompanying the meditations again are the Christmas passages which correspond to the meditations, and suggested discussion meditations and discussion are again provided. Hymns or taped music might well accompany the meditation time.

The third discussion centers around those not at the cradle and their reasons for not being there, and relates them to the modern world and the problem of awareness, commitment and education. Father Avelin lists the world of the 1960's -- and what of what he said then applies today. Again, scripture passages and time for silent meditation and discussion are provided.

The fourth session centers on the Vision of Christmas and looks at the Innocence of God in the Figure of the Infant Child -- Immanuel -- God with us. Again, there is accompanying scripture and time for meditation and discussion.

The first three meditations call us to an accounting, speak to our human condition, and try to reach us through messages that have grown cold to the message of the ages. The fourth and final meditation gives us hope that God, indeed, is with us and calls us that there is real reconciliation for our people in the Christmas message.

I hope that these messages will be valuable for your congregation and that people will be warmed and heartened by the voice of Father Delp reaching out to us from his own imprisonment.

I hope,too, that your church's Christian Education program is helped by this material. If you enjoyed using it, drop me a note, and possibly we can suggest other materials that might be of interest to your church. If the material did not work for your group, we would also be interested in hearing that, along with your assessment of why it didn't work.

Father Delp's material is not easy to use. It requires thought and preparation on the part of the leader. It is not plastic but rooted in his very real experiences leading to his own death. We believe, however, that there is hope in these meditations and it is a kind of hope rooted in reality for all oppressed people. We ask God's blessing upon your church if you choose to use the materials for we believe that the people who take part in the discussions will grow in their Christian faith.

We are interested in hearing from you.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Marge Ragona
MCC- L.A.
Christian Education Program

I hope that these messages will be valuable for your encouragement and that people will be spurred and heartened by the voice of a sister daily reaching out to us from his own experiences.

I hope, too, that your church's Christian Education program is helped by this material. If you enjoyed using it, drop me a note, and possibly we can prepare other materials that might be of interest to your church. If this material did not reach for your group, we would also be interested in hearing that, along with your suggestions of why it didn't work.

Further helpful material is not easy to find. We recommend thought and preparation on the part of the leader. It is not a little but rooted in his very soul. Experience leading to his own death. We believe, however, that there is hope in these meditations and it is a kind of hope needed in reality for all oppressed people. We ask God's blessing upon your church if you choose to use the materials for we believe that the people who take part in the discussions will grow in their Christian faith.

We are interested in hearing from you.

In Christ's love,

Rev. Harve Hagman
Mgr. L.A.
Christian Education Program

ADVENT MEDITATIONS

These meditations are drawn from a book by Father Alfred Delp, S.J. who was executed by the Nazis in Germany in 1945. Just before his death, Father Delp wrote a diary and a series of Advent meditations which were smuggled out of his prison page by page.

Opening Prayer

First Reading: Life with God and in God has its own laws and we cannot discover what they are from a reference book. Yet the conditions for their fulfilment are very straightforward and clear-cut -- less obscure than those of the ten commandments. All the same the thin thread on which they depend, the thread which unites the personal Thou of God with the personal I of the created being, can only be spun when they are being fulfilled.

The bridge linking the human with the divine has a very definite architecture. The foundations are God's affair. In God's all-embracing omnipotence there is a reaching out to humanity in a thousand different ways. To penetrate God's mysteries, to prayerfully and reverently become aware of God, is one of the highest exercises of the human mind and we are most likely to find the key to God's perpetual, relentless, compassionate, gracious reaching-out toward us in the lives of those we call saints. But the pattern which God has set for a relationship with humanity is not our present concern. If that were my only pre-occupation I should simply be satisfying a pious but very ordinary curiosity in spite of the exalted subject. But in order to get anywhere I must probe much more deeply, as indeed I am trying to do. It is a question of the fundamental conditions we must achieve in our own personal lives -- what we have to do is draw the bowstring taut and release the arrow so that the creative dialogue may begin.

I am not here casting the least doubt on the dogmatic teaching of the divine omnipotence and its goodwill toward humanity. There is no hint of doubt of the operation of grace, of God's goodness or of the merit of good deeds and decisions by which we confirm our attitude toward our Maker. But within this framework we have certain liberties and responsibilities and these are the crux of the matter. It is here that mere curiosity is converted into existential thought about the mystery of the success -- or failure -- of one's life.

To take an example: How is it that the most eloquent, logical, well-prepared sermon may produce response in some and leave others unmoved? How is it that whole generations and periods can exist in complete ignorance of, or without response to, the idea of God's creative immanence as though they were incapable of receiving the divine impulse? How is it that there are people in all periods of history who remain unmoved by the greatest miracles, by the most convincing proofs of providential guidance, by the severest penalties, or by the most inexorable strokes of divine justice?

Obviously this is more than merely an interesting theological or philosophical question -- it is very pertinent to our fate today. It sums up everything and on the attitude we adopt to it depends whether we are going to place ourselves once again under God's grace or whether, on the contrary, we are going to continue this miserable dance of death to the bitter end.

It comes down to this -- and there is no escape -- to which order will humanity give allegiance? Are we prepared to promote conditions in which the living contact with God can be re-established? For our lives have become Godless to the point of complete vacuity. God is no longer with us in the conscious sense of the word. God is denied, ignored, excluded from every claim to have a part in our daily life. We have ceased to admit God to our lives, we behave as if we no longer need God, and what is worse, we have actually become incapable of being God-conscious. It is a terrible thing to say about this modern world but as far as I can see it is true. We don't even have to look very far for proof of it -- there is sufficient evidence in the things that are happening every day, and pious horror at the state of the world will not help us in any way. The law to which our lives are subject which has brought about this state of affairs has already made our existence a reproach, reduced the world to rubble and ashes, to carnage and destruction. Now our most urgent concern is how to overcome the inner misery and seal off the source of this external chaos.

Christmas is the mystery of contact with God, fundamentally and actually. Those who are part of the approach to it can show us the human requirements which will make it possible for us once more to converse with God, and the conditions necessary if we are to re-establish contact with God.

Three different kinds of approaches are suggested by the Christmas mystery. First, there is the historical sequence of events recalled by the feast; secondly, there is the liturgical reconstruction of the mystery; and third, there is the silent yet eloquent participation of all present. Even the empty places have speech of their own and a message for us all.

Second Reading: Luke 1: 26-35

THOSE ROUND THE CRIB

We are familiar with the crib figures inside the stable or making their way to it. And on that journey to the stable they all have something significant to say to us about the mystery of life and the everyday world. Mary, Joseph, the Angels, the Shepherds, the Wise Men; these are the people gathered around the Child. Let us seek their message and learn their judgment on our own lives.

Third Reading: Let us put aside, for the moment, the venerated figure of the Blessed Virgin as such. It would be impossible to discuss that holy figure in one short paragraph; as "our Lady" she is a theme with an endless and perpetual message. But here let us think of her simply as the young girl, Mary, kneeling humbly before the manger in which lies the child she has just given us. She has her own message, a few words to offer us in the turmoil to which the estrangement between our benighted generation and the divine mystery has thrown us.

The fact that this night of nights brought forth the Light, that Mary kneels before the Christ, that motherhood and the grace of compassion have become a law of our life, that the ice of our inner solitude can be broken and melted by healing warmth, all this became possible because the maid Mary yielded of her own free choice to the inner prompting of God's voice. Her secret is self-surrender and willing acceptance, offering herself to the point of complete obliteration of her personal will.

That is both the message and the judgment of us. As a generation we are completely wrapped up in ourselves; we are always concerned with our self-fulfillment, our self-realization, our living conditions, and so on. Everything is organized for our self-gratification. And precisely because of this we are getting progressively poorer and more miserable. Mary's decision was complete surrender to God, and it is the only thing that can lead to human fulfillment. Hers is the decision that obeys the law of life.

Discussion/Meditation

Fourth Reading: Joseph - He is the man on the outskirts, standing in the shadows, quietly waiting, there when wanted and always ready to help. He is the man in whose life God is constantly intervening with warnings and visions. Without complaint he allows his own plans to be set aside. His life is a succession of prophecies and dream messages, of packing up and moving on. He is the man who dreams of setting up a quiet household, simply leading a decent home life and going about his affairs, attending to his business and worshipping God, and who, instead, is condemned to a life of wandering. Beset with doubts, heavy-hearted and uneasy in his mind, his whole life disrupted, he has to take to the open road, to make his way through an unfriendly country finding no shelter but a miserable stable for those he holds most dear. He is the one who sets aside all thought of self and shoulders his responsibilities bravely -- and obeys.

His message is willing obedience. He is the person who serves. It never enters his mind to question God's commands; he makes all the necessary preparations and is ready when God calls. Willing unquestioning service is the secret of his life. It is his message for us and his judgment of us. How proud and presumptuous and self sufficient we are! We have crabbed and confined God within the pitiable limits of our obstinacy, our complacency, our opportunism, our mania for"self-expression." We have given God -- and with that everything that is noble and spiritual and holy -- only the minimum of recognition, just as much as would serve to flatter our self-esteem and further our self-will. Just how wrong this is life itself has shown us since in consequence of our attitude we have come to abject bondage which forces the individual to sink his/her identity in the common mass whether he/she wants to or not. The prayer of St. Paul -- do with me what thou wilt -- the quiet readiness to serve of the man Joseph, could lead us to a truer and more genuine freedom.

Discussion/Meditation

Fifth Reading: The Angels - Not the plaster images made by us, but spirits of a higher order of existence identified with freedom, loyalty, wisdom and love. We meet them in the opening scene on the plain of Bethlehem singing hymns of joy and praise. But that is not the mystery or the law they represent -- that is their fruit and reward. They bring tidings, they announce God's mystery and summon the listeners to the adoration from which they themselves have risen. Their mystery is that they represent the afterglow of the divine reality they proclaim.

That is their message and their judgment of us. For a long time there have been no great spirits among us. They have dwindled and died out because gifted people have themselves broken the laws of the spirit. For the last hundred years intellectualism has been obsessed by the glorification of the self, as if truth and reality ought to consider it an honor to be perceived and recognized by such marvelous individuals. Spirit is no longer regarded as the living reflection of a higher life. Perception and awareness now pose as spirit itself. Dozens of prophets kindle new lights each with their own messages, their own ideas, but with no notion of mission or dedication -- that would be an offense against the autocracy and autonomy of genius That is why for a very long time there have been no communications worth listening to. We have had rare messengers of glad tidings singing paeans of praise. When such a voice has been raised publicly it has seemed illusory or has come from agonies of suffering -- an indication of the depths of our soul sickness.

Adoration, perception, proclamation; this is the cycle that represents the life of the spirit. Adoration prepares the soul for perception, since it loosens the tensions and dispels obstacles. The message once perceived enriches the soul, fulfilling its innermost needs and desires, but the proof is in the unfolding of life itself. Let us return to praising God, to proclaiming God joyfully, and then we shall find words that are significant and valuable. We shall see visions again and penetrate mysteries. Insight and decision and the message of the spirit will again become matters of importance, pushing aside the empty show and the bombast of "presentation" which has so much influence today.

Discussion/Meditation

Sixth Reading: Luke 2: 8-18

Seventh Reading: <u>The Shepherds</u> - They are symbols of a type. That they happened to be shepherds is unimportant -- they might equally have been farmers or hedge-crawling tramps who spend their nights in the open. But they had to be people capable of registering wonder, so I very much doubt whether they could have been the products of this mechanical age. They had to be people whose hearts still warmed to the recollection of the old promises. People, therefore, whose lives still had wide horizons from which the light of intuition and a thousand forebodings of spiritual realities were not excluded. People who were still able to believe in miracles. People upright and healthy enough to accept facts as facts, even when the mathematical calculations and the results of their experiments pointed to the contrary. Their secret lay in their purity of heart; their lively wakefulness of soul, their instant readiness to respond to the call. And underneath all this lay the fact that their lives still held desire and expectation; they longed for the fulfillment of the promises they remembered and implicitely believed.

That is their message for us and the standard they judge us by. As a type, people like these simple shepherds no longer exist. I am not referring to the profession or occupation, but simply to their character, to that wakeful readiness to accept miracles, that genuine inner prompting which altogether overshadowed self. The astonishing instinctive confidence which expects a miracle springs from the inner relationship between the yearning of humanity and the promises of God. The type is no longer with us. The world is full of miracles

but no one sees them; our eyes have lost the power to perceive them. God's messengers would take a hand in our affairs more frequently if only our hearts could recapture the rhythm that calls them forth. Of all the messages, this is the most difficult to accept. We find it hard to believe that people of active faith no longer exist. If we can revive faith in all its strength the whole world will change.

Eighth Reading: Matthew 2: 1-10

Ninth Reading: "The Journey of the Magi," T. S. Eliot

Tenth Reading: The Wise Men - Whether they were really kings or just local eastern chieftains or learned astronomers is not in the least important. Their hearts were filled with wisdom and the aspirations of their people, and that is what really concerns us. Only those people of the highest type could have undertaken such a journey for such a purpose. They brought all the longing of their nations with them to the place of the encounter for its fulfillment. Through the desert by way of royal palaces, the libraries of the learned, and the counsel chambers of the priests -- and they ended their journey at last at a manger in a poor stable.

Here again we have a distinct type. The secret of these people is as plain to us as is the case of the shepherds. They are people with clear eyes that probe things to their very depths. They have a real hunger and thirst for knowledge. I know what that means now. They are capable of arriving at right decisions. They subordinate their lives to the end in view and they willingly journey to the ends of the earth in quest of knowledge, following a star, a sign, obeying an inner voice that would never have made itself heard but for their hunger and the intense alertness that hunger produces. Such people are regal in every impulse; they can rise above every situation even when it involves great suffering. The compelling earnestness of their quest, the unshakable persistence of their search, the royal grandeur of their dedication -- these are their secrets.

And it is their message for us and their judgment of us. Why do so few ever see the star? Only because so few are looking for it. People often resolve to do things and then trivial, more pressing preoccupations get in the way. At the time of the nativity the world had already been under firm control for a thousand years. Everything was well organized and things were getting better every day! We have been saying this for so long nowadays that our middle-class complacency has become sated with banal truisms and at last is forcing us to ask a few questions. But we are

ADVENT MEDITATIONS

Those who are used to the normal run of spiritual books and meditations may have to adjust themselves to a new and perhaps disturbing outlook. These meditations were written by a man literally in chains, condemned to be executed as a traitor to his country in time of war. They are completely free from the myopic platitudes and insensitive complacencies of routine piety. Set in the familiar framework of seasonal meditations on Advent, these are new and often shocking insights into realities which we sometimes discuss academically, but which are here experienced in their naked, uncompromising truth. These are the thoughts of a man who, caught in a well-laid trap of political lies, clung desperately to a truth that was revealed to him in solitude, helplessness, emptiness and desperation. Face to face with inescapable physical death, he reached out in anguish for the truth without which his spirit could not breath and survive. The truth was granted him, and we share it in these meditations, awed by the realization that it was given him not for himself alone, but for us, who need it just as desperately -- perhaps more desperately -- than he did.

These meditations were written in Advent of 1944. Defeat for the Nazis was already certain. Hitler alone refused to see it, and was still receiving lucky answers from the stars. Father Delp had long since refused to accept the collective delusion. In 1943 he had joined the secret discussions of the Kreisau Circle, an anti-Nazi group that was planning a new social order to be built on Christian lines after the war. That was all. But since it implied a complete repudiation of the compulsive myths and preposterous fictions of Nazism, it constituted high treason.

Father Delp was tried in a trial that was a show, staged by a specialist in such matters...Father Delp was singled out as one of the chief villains, and in his case, the prosecution smeared not only the prisoner but the Jesuit Order and the Catholic Church as well. The prosecution also tried to incriminate them in the attempted assassination of Hitler the previous July, but this was obviously out of the question and the charge was dropped. This was plainly a religious trial. The crime was heresy against Nazism. As Father Delp summed it up in his last letter: "The actual reason for my condemnation was that I happened to be and chose to remain a Jesuit." (He might well have said, "Because I chose to remain a Christian.")

Father Delp had no hesitation in evaluating the choice of those who, in the name of religion (as many had) followed the Nazi government in its policy of conquest first and a new world later. He said:

> "The most pious prayer can become a blasphemy if he who offers it tolerates or helps to further conditions which are fatal to humanity, which render us unacceptable to God, or weaken our spiritual, moral or religious sense."

What is their value to us in Metropolitan Community Church? Father Delp cared desperately that each of us would respond to an inner need for truth, and struggle to recover our spiritual freedom. He wants us to listen to the voice crying in the wilderness -- to become aware of our devastated condition before it is too late. He begs us to confront God, to face inner solitude and recover mysterious sources of hope and strength. Father Delp believed that we are often blind to spiritual things even when we think we are seeing them: and indeed perhaps most blind when we are convinced that we see. We are surrendered, too often, as persons to be used

Introduction

as "things" and our spiritual creativity has dried up at its source. We are no longer alive with passionate convictions, but centered on our own empty and alienated selves, and we become destructive, negative, violent. We lose all insight, all compassion. Or else our souls, shocked into insensitivity by suffering and alienation, remain simply numb, inert and hopeless. We hope in matter and the power we can gain from manipulation of it. Or else, in abject self-contempt, we believe in our own unworthiness more than in the creative power of God.

Father Delp calls us from traditional "spirituality" or "piety" to the creative unrest of the truly spiritual person. He calls us away from "religion" which has become formal, apathetic, bloodless, and unloving. He calls us to truly please God, by regaining our humanity, to face our desperation, and to stop giving the illusion of holiness and stop concerning ourselves with feeding our own pious souls for our own satisfaction. Father Delp wants us to concern ourselves with freedom, to regain our spiritual health, grow and respond to God. "None of the contemporary religious movements take for their starting point the position of humanity as human beings...they do not help us in the depths of our need but merely skim the surface...They concentrate on the difficulties of the religious minded who still have religious leanings. They do not succeed in coordinating the forms of religion with a state of existence that no longer accepts its values. We need to find out what people need, and to devote some thought to the question that possibly, in a dialogue with them, they might have something to give us. "

The Advent discovery that Father Delp made, pacing up and down in his cell in chains was that in the very midst of his desolation, the messengers of God were present. This discovery was in no way due to his own spiritual efforts, his own will to believe, his own purity of heart. The "blessed messengers" were pure gifts from God, which could never have been anticipated, never foreseen, never planned by human consciousness. In the darkness of defeat and degradation, the seeds of light and hope were being sown. In his Advent meditations, with all the simplicity of traditional Christian faith, and in images that are seldom remarkable for any special originality, Father Delp describes in the ruin of the society around him an "advent" in which the messengers of God are preparing for the future. "Unless we have been shocked to our depths by ourselves and the things we are capable of, as well as the failings of humanity as a whole, we cannot understand the full import of Advent." Father Delp is reiterating St. Paul's realization of our helplessness and God's grace, not as opposed, fighting for primacy in our lives, but as a single existential unit -- sinful humanity redeemed in Christ. Father Delp cries out for Christian liberty and personal dignity -- and yet liberation from fixation on our own subjective needs and compulsions -- recognizing that we cannot fully become persons until we understand our need for community and our duty of serving others.

These meditations are both disturbing and hopeful. There is something mystical about them -- yet the mystic recognized a responsibility to be engaged in political action, and because he followed messengers of God into the midst of fanatical and absurb political crisis, he was put to death. There is a place for the prophet and the mystic in our century. Certainly in MCC, we have been surrounded by both -- and yet by mystics who were not totally outside of society, not removed from the world. This mystic did not reject the world in order to seek his own salvation without concern for the rest of humanity. Nor must we. The freedom seeking person,

may well find that instead of being able to provide words of comfort for the complacent that she or he will have become "a voice crying in the wilderness," and many of us in MCC have found ourselves in that place. We are part of a prophetic church, crying out for the liberation of humankind. If we do not face the anguish of being true prophets, We will have the carrion comfort of acceptance in the society of the deluded by becoming false prophets and participating in the world's delusions. These meditations are a way of becoming involved in the world, of praying for it from within it. As we are within the world, as we are both part of the oppressed and the liberation, as we become responsible for our own and others quest for freedom, these meditations from prison remind us that we are -- willing or not -- the voice crying in the wilderness.

Adapted from the Introduction
by Thomas Merton to The Prison
Meditations of Father Delp

Adapted by Rev. Marge Ragona, MCC-L.A. Christian Education Program

The Prison Meditations of Father Delp, Alfred Delp, S.J. (with Introduction by Thomas Merton) MacMillan, New York, 1963

ADVENT MEDITATIONS

THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

OPENING PRAYER

Advent is the time for rousing. We are shaken to our very depths, so that we may wake up to the truth of ourselves. The primary condition for a fruitful and rewarding Advent is renunciation, surrender. We must let go of our mistaken dreams, out conceited poses and arrogant gesture, all the pretenses with which we hope to deceive ourselves and others. If we fail to do this stark reality may take hold of us and rouse us forcibly in a way that will entail both anxiety and suffering.

The kind of awakening that literally shocks our whole being is part and parcel of the Advent idea. A deep emotional experience like this is necessary to kindle the inner light which confirms the blessing and the promise of the Lord. A shattering awakening; that is the necessary preliminary. Life only begins when the whole framework is shaken. There can be no proper preparation without this. It is precisely in the shock of rousing while we are still deep in the helpless, semi-conscious state, in the pitiable weakness of that borderland between sleep and waking, that we find the golden thread which binds earth to heaven and gives the benighted soul some inkling of the fullness it is capable of realizing and is called upon to realize.

We ought not to ignore Advent meditations like these. We have to listen, to keep watch, to let our heart quicken under the impulse of the indwelling Spirit. Only in this quiescent state can the true blessing of Advent be experienced and then we shall also recognize it in other ways. Once awakened to an inner awareness we are constantly surprised by symbols bearing the Advent message, figures of tried and proved personalities that bring out in a most forceful way the inner meaning of Advent and emphasize its blessing.

I am thinking of three in particular--The voice crying in the wilderness, the herald angel, and Mary.

The Voice Crying in the Wilderness -- We live in an age which has every right to consider itself no wilderness. But woe to any age in which the voice crying in the wilderness can no longer be heard because the noises of everyday life drown it -- or restrictions forbid it -- or it is lost in the hurry and turmoil of "progress" -- or simply stifled by authority, misled by fear and cowardice. Then the destructive weeds will spreak so suddenly and rapidly that the word "wilderness" will recur to our minds willy-nilly. I believe we are no strangers to this discovery.

Yet for all this, where are the voices that should ring out in protest and accusation? There should never be any lack of prophets like John the Baptist in the kaleidoscope of life at any period; brave people inspired by the dynamic compulsion of the mission to which they are dedicated, true witnesses following the lead of their hearts and endowed with clear vision and unerring judgment. Such people do not cry out for the sake of making a noise or the pleasure of hearing their own voices, or because they envy others the good things which have not come their way on account of their singular attitude towards life. They are above envy and have a solace known only to those who have crossed both the inner and outer borders of existence. These people proclaim the message of healing and salvation. They warn us of our chance, because they can already feel the ground heaving beneath their feet, feel the beams cracking and the great mountains shuddering inwardly and the stars swining in space. They cry out to us,urging us to save ourselves by a change of heart before the coming of the catastrophes threatening to overwhelm us.

O God, surely enough people nowadays know what it means to clear away bomb dust and rubble of destruction, making the rough places smooth again. They will know it for many years to come with this labor weighing upon them. O, may the arresting voices of the wilderness ring out warning humanity in good time that ruin and devastation actually spread from within. May the Advent figure of St. John the Baptist, the incorruptible herald and teacher in God's name, be no longer a stranger in our own wilderness. Much depends on such symbolic figures in our lives. For how shall we hear if there is none to cry out, none whose voice can rise above the tumult violence and destruction, the false clamor that deafens us to reality.

Second Reading: Isaiah 40: 1-11

Meditation/Discussion (Who have been some of the "Voices crying in the Wilderness" in your life?)

The Herald Angel -- Never have I entered on Advent so vitally and intensely alert as I am now. When I pace my cell, up and down, three paces one way and three the other, my hands manacled, an unknown fate in front of me, then the tidings of our Lord's coming to redeem the world and deliver it have a quite different and more vivid meaning. And my mind keeps going back to the angel someone gave me as a present during Advent two or three years ago. It bore the inscription: "Be of good cheer. The Lord is near." A bomb destroyed it. The same bomb killed the donor and I often have the feeling that he is rendering me some heavenly aid. It would be impossible to endure the horror of these times -- like the horror of life itself, could we only see it clearly enough -- if there were not this other knowledge which constantly buoys us up and gives us strength: the knowledge of the promises that have been given and fulfilled. And the awareness of the angels of good tidings, uttering their blessed messages in the midst of all this trouble and sowing the seed of blessing where it will sprout in the middle of the night. The angels of Advent are not the bright jubilant beings who trumpet the tidings of fulfilment to a waiting world. Quiet and unseen they enter our shabby rooms and our hearts as they did of old. In the silence of night they pose God's questions and proclaim the wonders of Christ with whom all things are possible.

Advent, even when things are going wrong, is a period from which a message can be drawn. May the time never come when we forget about the good tidings and promises when so immured within the four walls of our prisons our very eyes are dimmed and we see nothing but grey days through barred windows placed too high to see out of. May the time never come when we no longer hear the soft footsteps of the herald angel, or the cheering words that penetrate the soul. Should such a time come all will be lost. Then indeed we shall be living in bankruptcy and hope will die in our hearts. For the first thing we must do if we want to raise ourselves out of this sterile life is to open our hearts to the golden seed which God's angels are waiting to sow in it. And one other thing: We must ourselves go forth through out these days as a bringer of glad tidings. There is so much despair that cries out for comfort; there is so much faint courage that needs to be reinforced; there is so much perplexity that yearns for reasons and meanings. God's messengers, who have themselves reaped the fruits of divine seeds sown even in the darkest hours, know how to wait for the fullness of harvest. Patience and faith are needed, not because we believe in the earth or in our stars, or in our temperament or our good disposition, but because we have received the message of God's herald angel and have ourselves encountered God's messenger.

Fourth Reading: Luke 1: 5:17

Discussion/Meditation (How have "Herald Angels" come to you in time of need?)

Mary - She is a comforting figure. The fact that the angel's annunciation found a comforting heart ready to receive the Word, and that it grew beyond its earthly environment to the very heights of heaven, is the holiest of all Advent consolations. What use are all the lessons learned through our suffering and misery if no bridge can be thrown from our side to the other shore? What is the point of our return from error and fear if it brings no enlightenment, does not penetrate the darkness and dispel it? What use is it shuddering at the world's coldness, which all the time grows more intense, if we cannot discover the grace to conjure up visions of better conditions?

Authors of legends and fairy tales have always used mothers as a favorite theme for rousing the strongest human feelings. Often mothers are a symbol of the earth's fertility. Behind this symbolism lies a universal hunger and yearning, we all want consolation and comforting. We each at times need to present ourselves before God and seek the trustful security of a mother's heart, to find ourselves back at our roots.

On the grey horizon eventually light will dawn. The foreground is very obtrusive; it asserts itself so firmly with its noise and bustle but it does not really amount to much. The things that really matter are further off -- there conditions are different. The woman has conceived a child, has carried it and has brought forth one new human being -- and thereby the world has passed under a new law. You see, this is not just a sequence of historical events that stand out in isolation. It is a symbol of the new order of things that affects the whole of our life and every phase of our being.

Today we must have the courage to look at Jesus' mother as a symbolic figure. At the core of these times through which we are living are also carried the blessing and mystery of God. They are pregnant times. It is only a matter of waiting and of knowing how to wait until the hour has struck and we will be delivered. Meanwhile we are held close and secure.

Sixth Reading: Luke 1:46-55

Meditation/Discussion (How have you been comforted -- spiritually and really -- when you have needed it?)

Advent in three holy and symbolic forms. It is not meant as a flight of fancy but as a message addressed to me and to you, reader, if ever these pages find you. Its purpose is not good prose but an exposition of truth which we must refer to again and again as a standard and a source of encouragement when the burden of our days becomes too heavy and confining.

Let us pray for receptive and willing hearts that the warnings God sends us may penetrate our minds and help us to overcome the wilderness of life. Let us have the courage to take the words of the Messenger to heart and not ignore them, lest those who are our executioners today may at some future time be our accusers for the suppression of truth.

And let us kneel and pray for clear vision, that we may recognize God's messenger when one comes, and willing hearts to understand the words of the message. The world is greater than the burden it bears, and life is more than the total of its days. Golden threads of reality are already shining through; if we look we can see them shining everywhere. Let us never forget this; we must be our own comforters. The one who promotes hope is a person of promise, one of whom much may be expected.

And once again let us pray for faith in compassion and consolation, the blessings of life symbolized in Jesus' mother. Life has to hold its own against ruthless and tyrannical forces, not only today but at all times. We have the responsibility for consoling not only others but ourselves, for acting compassionately with others and with ourselves. We need to recognize the need for parenting and in turn provide the parental care and guidance for others, not forgetting that we too need nurturing.

Let us have patience and wait in the spirit of Advent for that hour in which it shall be pleasing for God to reveal Godself anew. Often we first meet God in the very darkest hour and that meeting becomes the fruit and mastery of those terrible times. A radiant fulfilment is coming and we can hear the first tentative notes of jubilation. It is not yet a full chorus but only an indication, a hint, far away. But it is drawing nearer. That is all for today, but for tomorrow the angels will joyfully proclaim the event and we shall be happy if we have believed and faithfully trusted in the Advent.

CLOSING PRAYER AND MEDITATION

Final Reading: JEREMIAH 31: 31-34

The Prison Meditations of Father Delp, Alfred Delp, S.J. (with Introduction by Thomas Merton) MacMillan Company, New York, 1963.

Second Week of Advent

ADVENT MEDITATIONS

These meditations are drawn from a book by Father Alfred Delp, S.J. who was executed by the Nazis in Germany in 1945. Just before his death, Father Delp wrote a diary and a series of Advent meditations which were smuggled out of his prison page by page.

Opening Prayer

First Reading: Life with God and in God has its own laws and we cannot discover what they are from a reference book. Yet the conditions for their fulfilment are very straightforward and clear-cut -- less obscure than those of the ten commandments. All the same the thin thread on which they depend, the thread which unites the personal Thou of God with the personal I of the created being, can only be spun when they are being fulfilled.

The bridge linking the human with the divine has a very definite architecture. The foundations are God's affair. In God's all-embracing omnipotence there is a reaching out to humanity in a thousand different ways. To penetrate God's mysteries, to prayerfully and reverently become aware of God, is one of the highest exercises of the human mind and we are most likely to find the key to God's perpetual, relentless, compassionate, gracious reaching-out toward us in the lives of those we call saints. But the pattern which God has set for a relationship with humanity is not our present concern. If that were my only pre-occupation I should simply be satisfying a pious but very ordinary curiosity in spite of the exalted subject. But in order to get anywhere I must probe much more deeply, as indeed I am trying to do. It is a question of the fundamental conditions we must achieve in our own personal lives -- what we have to do is draw the bowstring taut and release the arrow so that the creative dialogue may begin.

I am not here casting the least doubt on the dogmatic teaching of the divine omnipotence and its goodwill toward humanity. There is no hint of doubt of the operation of grace, of God's goodness or of the merit of good deeds and decisions by which we confirm our attitude toward our Maker. But within this framework we have certain liberties and responsibilities and these are the crux of the matter. It is here that mere curiosity is converted into existential thought about the mystery of the success -- or failure -- of one's life.

To take an example: How is it that the most eloquent, logical, well-prepared sermon may produce response in some and leave others unmoved? How is it that whole generations and periods can exist in complete ignorance of, or without response to, the idea of God's creative immanence as though they were incapable of receiving the divine impulse? How is it that there are people in all periods of history who remain unmoved by the greatest miracles, by the most convincing proofs of providential guidance, by the severest penalties, or by the most inexorable strokes of divine justice?

Obviously this is more than merely an interesting theological or philosophical question -- it is very pertinent to our fate today. It sums up everything and on the attitude we adopt to it depends whether we are going to place curselves once again under God's grace or whether, on the contrary, we are going to continue this miserable dance of death to the bitter end.

It comes down to this -- and there is no escape -- to which order will humanity give allegiance? Are we prepared to promote conditions in which the living contact with God can be re-established? For our lives have become Godless to the point of complete vacuity. God is no longer with us in the conscious sense of the word. God is denied, ignored, excluded from every claim to have a part in our daily life. We have ceased to admit God to our lives, we behave as if we no longer need God, and what is worse, we have actually become incapable of being God-conscious. It is a terrible thing to say about this modern world but as far as I can see it is true. We don't even have to look very far for proof of it -- there is sufficient evidence in the things that are happening every day, and pious horror at the state of the world will not help us in any way. The law to which our lives are subject which has brought about this state of affairs has already made our existence a reproach, reduced the world to rubble and ashes, to carnage and destruction. Now our most urgent concern is how to overcome the inner misery and seal off the source of this external chaos.

Christmas is the mystery of contact with God, fundamentally and actually. Those who are part of the approach to it can show us the human requirements which will make it possible for us once more to converse with God, and the conditions necessary if we are to re-establish contact with God.

Three different kinds of approaches are suggested by the Christmas mystery. First, there is the historical sequence of events recalled by the feast; secondly, there is the liturgical reconstruction of the mystery; and third, there is the silent yet eloquent participation of all present. Even the empty places have speech of their own and a message for us all.

Second Reading: Luke 1: 26-35

THOSE ROUND THE CRIB

We are familiar with the crib figures inside the stable or making their way to it. And on that journey to the stable they all have something significant to say to us about the mystery of life and the everyday world. Mary, Joseph, the Angels, the Shepherds, the Wise Men; these are the people gathered around the Child. Let us seek their message and learn their judgment on our own lives.

Third Reading: Let us put aside, for the moment, the venerated figure of the Blessed Virgin as such. It would be impossible to discuss that holy figure in one short paragraph; as "our Lady" she is a theme with an endless and perpetual message. But here let us think of her simply as the young girl, Mary, kneeling humbly before the manger in which lies the child she has just given us. She has her own message, a few words to offer us in the turmoil to which the estrangement between our benighted generation and the divine mystery has thrown us.

The fact that this night of nights brought forth the Light, that Mary kneels before the Christ, that motherhood and the grace of compassion have become a law of our life, that the ice of our inner solitude can be broken and melted by healing warmth, all this became possible because the maid Mary yielded of her own free choice to the inner prompting of God's voice. Her secret is self-surrender and willing acceptance, offering herself to the point of complete obliteration of her personal will.

That is both the message and the judgment of us. As a generation we are completely wrapped up in ourselves; we are always concerned with our self-fulfillment, our self-realization, our living conditions, and so on. Everything is organized for our self-gratification. And precisely because of this we are getting progressively poorer and more miserable. Mary's decision was complete surrender to God, and it is the only thing that can lead to human fulfillment. Hers is the decision that obeys the law of life.

Discussion/Meditation: (Where have you been obedient/needed to be obedient but rejected it?)

MT. 1:18-23 Luke 2:1-7

Fourth Reading: Joseph - He is the man on the outskirts, standing in the shadows, quietly waiting, there when wanted and always ready to help. He is the man in whose life God is constantly intervening with warnings and visions. Without complaint he allows his own plans to be set aside. His life is a succession of prophecies and dream messages, of packing up and moving on. He is the man who dreams of setting up a quiet household, simply leading a decent home life and going about his affairs, attending to his business and worshipping God, and who, instead, is condemned to a life of wandering. Beset with doubts, heavy-hearted and uneasy in his mind, his whole life disrupted, he has to take to the open road, to make his way through an unfriendly country finding no shelter but a miserable stable for those he holds most dear. He is the one who sets aside all thought of self and shoulders his responsibilities bravely -- and obeys.

His message is willing obedience. He is the person who serves. It never enters his mind to question God's commands; he makes all the necessary preparations and is ready when God calls. Willing unquestioning service is the secret of his life. It is his message for us and his judgment of us. How proud and presumptuous and self sufficient we are! We have crabbed and confined God within the pitiable limits of our obstinacy, our complacency, our opportunism, our mania for"self-expression." We have given God -- and with that everything that is noble and spiritual and holy -- only the minimum of recognition, just as much as would serve to flatter our self-esteem and further our self-will. Just how wrong this is life itself has shown us since in consequence of our attitude we have come to abject bondage which forces the individual to sink his/her identity in the common mass whether he/she wants to or not. The prayer of St. Paul -- do with me what thou wilt -- the quiet readiness to serve of the man Joseph, could lead us to a truer and more genuine freedom.

Discussion/Meditation (What is God asking you to do? What is standing in the way?)

Luke 2:8-14

Fifth Reading: The Angels - Not the plaster images made by us, but spirits of a higher order of existence identified with freedom, loyalty, wisdom and love. We meet them in the opening scene on the plain of Bethlehem singing hymns of joy and praise. But that is not the mystery or the law they represent -- that is their fruit and reward. They bring tidings, they announce God's mystery and summon the listeners to the adoration from which they themselves have risen. Their mystery is that they represent the afterglow of the divine reality they proclaim.

That is their message and their judgment of us. For a long time there have been no great spirits among us. They have dwindled and died out because gifted people have themselves broken the laws of the spirit. For the last hundred years intellectualism has been obsessed by the glorification of the self, as if truth and reality ought to consider it an honor to be perceived and recognized by such marvelous individuals. Spirit is no longer regarded as the living reflection of a higher life. Perception and awareness now pose as spirit itself. Dozens of prophets kindle new lights each with their own messages, their own ideas, but with no notion of mission or dedication -- that would be an offense against the autocracy and autonomy of genius That is why for a very long time there have been no communications worth listening to. We have had rare messengers of glad tidings singing paeans of praise. When such a voice has been raised publicly it has seemed illusory or has come from agonies of suffering -- an indication of the depths of our soul sickness.

Adoration, perception, proclamation; this is the cycle that represents the life of the spirit. Adoration prepares the soul for perception, since it loosens the tensions and dispels obstacles. The message once perceived enriches the soul, fulfilling its innermost needs and desires, but the proof is in the unfolding of life itself. Let us return to praising God, to proclaiming God joyfully, and then we shall find words that are significant and valuable. We shall see visions again and penetrate mysteries. Insight and decision and the message of the spirit will again become matters of importance, pushing aside the empty show and the bombast of "presentation" which has so much influence today.

Discussion/Meditation (What glad tidings of God's presence in your life are you able to share?)

Sixth Reading: Luke 2:18-18

Seventh Reading: The Shepherds - They are symbols of a type. That they happened to be shepherds is unimportant -- they might equally have been farmers or hedge-crawling tramps who spend their nights in the open. But they had to be people capable of registering wonder, so I very much doubt whether they could have been the products of this mechanical age. They had to be people whose hearts still warmed to the recollection of the old promises. People, therefore, whose lives still had wide horizons from which the light of intuition and a thousand forebodings of spiritual realities were not excluded. People who were still able to believe in miracles. People upright and healthy enough to accept facts as facts, even when the mathematical calculations and the results of their experiments pointed to the contrary. Their secret lay in their purity of heart; their lively wakefulness of soul, their instant readiness to respond to the call. And underneath all this lay the fact that their lives still held desire and expectation; they longed for the fulfillment of the promises they remembered and implicitely believed.

That is their message for us and the standard they judge us by. As a type, people like these simple shepherds no longer exist. I am not referring to the profession or occupation, but simply to their character, to that wakeful readiness to accept miracles, that genuine inner prompting which altogether overshadowed self. The astonishing instinctive confidence which expects a miracle springs from the inner relationship between the yearning of humanity and the promises of God. The type is no longer with us. The world is full of miracles

but no one sees them; our eyes have lost the power to perceive them. God's messengers would take a hand in our affairs more frequently if only our hearts could recapture the rhythm that calls them forth. Of all the messages, this is the most difficult to accept. We find it hard to believe that people of active faith no longer exist. If we can revive faith in all its strength this whole world will change.

Meditation/Discussion: (How can you make your faith more active, more vital -- more real.)

Eighth Reading: Matthew 2:1-10

Ninth Reading: "The Journey of the Magi" T.S. Eliot

Tenth Reading: The Wise Men - Whether they were really kings or just local eastern chieftains or learned astronoerms is not in the least important. Their hearts were filled with wisdom and the aspirations of their people, and that is what really concerns us. Only those people of the highest type could have undertaken such a journey for such a purpose. They brought all the longing of their nations with them to the place of the encounter for its fulfilment. Through the desert by way of royal palaces, the libraries of the learned, and the counsel chambers of the priests -- and they ended their journey at last at a manger in a poor stable.

Here again we have a distinct type. The secret of these people is as plain to us as is the case of the shepherds. They are people with clear eyes that probe things to their very depths. They have a real hunger and thirst for knowledge. I know what that means now. They are capable of arriving at right decisions. They subordinate their lives to the end in view and they willingly journey to the ends of the earth in quest of knowledge, following a star, a sign, obeying an inner voice that would never have made itself heard but for their hunger and the intense alertness that hunger produces. Such people are regal in every impulse; they can rise above every situation even when it involves great suffering. The compelling earnestness of their quest, the unshakeable persistence of their search, the royal gradueur of their dedication -- these are their secrets.

And it is their message for us and their judgment of us. Why do so few ever see the star? Only because so few are looking for it. People often resolve to do things and then trivial, more pressing preoccupations get in the way. At the time of the nativity the world had already been under firm control for a thousand years. Everything was well organized and things were getting better every day! We have been saying this for so long nowadays that our middle-class complacency has become sated with banal truisms and at last is forcing us to ask a few questions. But we are still at the perplexed and puzzled and frustrated stage; we have not yet reached the point where these questions set up a sense of inner compulsion and urgency. The star which could light the way is still invisible to our half-closed eyes.

What are we looking for anyway? And where will be find a genuine yearning so strong that neither fatigue, nor distance, nor fear of the unknown nor loneliness nor ridicule will deter us? Only such a passionate desire can prompt the persistence which is content to kneel even when the ultimate goal turns out to be a simple stable. Those capable of such dedication penetrate to the heart of

things and understand why that should be the outcome. A thousand secret longings of the spirit and the heart have paved the way for faith and sanctified them for the act of adoration.

Meditation/Discussion (What are you looking for? Would you settle for finding it in a stable?)

Closing Prayer

The Prison Meditations of Father Delp, Alfred Delp, S.J., (with introduction by Thomas Merton) MacMillan, N.Y., 1963.

ADVENT MEDITATIONS

The Third Week of Advent

OPENING PRAYER

The People Who Are Not at the Crib - Even those who are not there have a message for us and a judgment to give if only to make us realize what it is that keeps usseparated from God. After all, as a people today we are not at the crib either. Yet the emotions aroused by much that we are living through ought certainly to make us want to be there.

Those who were not there include the powerful, the wealthy and the learned leaders of the synogogue -- that is, the powerful heads of the established church.
Matthew 2:16-23
The Powerful - Neither the Roman procurator nor the recognized native rulers made their appearance at the crib to receive ratification of their power. Power can only be genuine and good when it is rooted in the divine. These people possessed power in their own right and used it only to further their own ends. Theirs is the mystery of power. Those who possess power have the implicit duty -- and the opportunity -- to serve as God's deputies. The French, more realistic than we, have two different words, force and puissance (power/strength,power over vs. power to) Puissance conveys the awe inspiring impression of inner power. Power in itself and as the sum total of all the means of enforcing it becomes destructive in the hands of arrogant totalitarian authority and ruins both the one who wields it and the subjects on whom it is exercised. The tyrant in possession of such power is no longer capable of spiritual sensitivity. Tyrants are suspicious of everything that does not fit into the narrow limits of permitted and regulated expression. There was no paragraph in the rules at Jerusalem covering the birth of the child at Bethlehem. Hence the reaction of perplexity and fear and the prompt recourse to the sword. In circumstances like these the subject beings grow timid and cowardly; they accept that their claim to life is cut to the basic minimum of official permission.

Dare we ignore this message and judgment? The history of power in the Western world is onelong story of ruthless force. There is no room in it for the glory of God which is neither safeguarded nor respected. The great are concerned only with their own importance and spend their lives jockeying for position. And the consequences, as far as they concern humanity as a whole are only too obvious. Fear has become a cardinal virtue. This is not said in a spirit of anarchy. But power must regain its proper dimension, allying itself with eternal purpose and genuine mission. Otherwise it will merely evoke counter-action and the ghastly struggle for survival will never end. And as subordinate beings humans must waken to the inherent sovereignty of their spirits, believing in conscience and their relationships with God.

Meditation/Discussion: How does "power over" control you life and keep you from being what God wants you to be?

Reading: Luke 4:18-19

The Wealthy - There is nothing wrong in having great possessions. But when our possessions rob us of our freedom and make us slaves then they become evil. It was like this at the time of the Nativity, and the palaces and fine houses were not destined to shelter the Lord. Great possessions can and should be a blessing. But the owners of treasure are also people who are afraid of any order of things not

covered by the official records. It is so now and it was so then -- Our Lord's words on the subject are well known.

A great many hasty judgments have been made in this connection and much prejudice has been based on them -- Marxist socialism, the condemnation of private ownership, and so on. We must keep a sense of proportion. All the same it is clear that the unsolved problem of wealth, of unearned income and so on is one of the themes of our time. In the last century control passed from the hands of the wise and these burning questions no longer came up against the moderating influence of tolerance, wisdom and a sense of duty. Evils that were dealt with by the materialistic society of the nineteenth century were at the mercy of self-interest, expediency, indignation. The highest ideals were lacking and there was palpably no trace of that spiritual attitude based on the divine nature that makes us all free. So it is not surprising that ordinary people's spiritual mechanism has rusted and become practically useless. Therefore those endowed with great possessions cannot be found in the devout circle around the crib. Some are absent because their possessions have robbed them of proper insight, others because the things they covet have made them incapable of any other interest. It is undeniable that every human being is entitled to a living space, daily bread and the protection of the law as a common birthright; these are fundamentals and should not be handed out as an act of charity.

Meditation/Discussion (In what ways do your belongings or search for money keep you from truly ~~living out~~ your faith?)

4th Reading The Learned - Great learning and prayer have little in common. It was so then and is still so today. Learning is besotted and bemused by the brilliance of its own ideas and has an overweeningly high opinion of its own interpretation of the world's affairs. And whenever the world takes a course not laid down in the books it is immediately suspect.

Western thought is inordinately proud of having "grown up" in the last century. It considers itself completely adult and self-possessed. Meanwhile in obedience to its own law it is no longer spreading its wings like an eagle, no longer adventuring to the horizon. It has become a mere appendage to earthbound utility blind and blunted to certain aspects of truth. But human nature is so constituted that even in its most debased and blinded state it still needs to ape God and set itself on a pedestal as if it were divine. Unconsciously it is reaching out towards a state it might be capable of achieving if it were not so in love with itself and forever leading itself and its world into the icy mire of materialism.

No, the learned are not found among those devout souls kneeling round the crib in the stable. They are the types whom later, when Jesus was grown, the Child was to embrace in the lament "Woe, Woe"; but then they did not understand that either. The wise men, those whose prescience came from the heart, knew where they were going and the goal they were looking for. They were capable of adoration.

The thoroughly learned today cannot be bothered with prayer. Should their thoughts ever wander in the direction of the crib they would surround it with signs and symbols, propaganda slogans, culture jargon and so on. They overlook the simple unquestionable truths God has laid down. Clearly the whole destiny of the West is tied up with this problem. A glance into our schools and universities should suffice to prove that the problem of destiny is unsolved.

Meditation/Discussion (Can you sort out what you have been taught from what you know to be real for you? How does your "education" stand in the way of your faith?)

5th Reading The Established Church - The synagogue had no part in the adoration at the manger. The synogogue was in fact one-track minded: it had an expectation and had no time or attention for anything except that clear-cut idea and its hoped-for realization. The books had even foretold that Bethlehem was the place where that realization would come to pass, yet so completely were the priests shrouded in their own shriveled ideas that their senses had become numbed and that numbness prevented their recognizing the signs of their time. No star pointed the way for them, no gleam of intuition lightened their darkness. They were bemused by their own self-sufficiency and heard nothing of the angels' song.

If only this were merely a tale to point a moral. But it is the plain truth; it really happened. The new spirit of Creation flows without interruption through the new Church -- but how much force it requires to achieve its purpose. The officers of the Church have the inner guidance of the Spirit -- but what about the executive departments? And the beaurocratic officials? And the mechanical "believers" who "believe" in everything, in every ceremony, every ritual -- but know nothing whatever about the living God? One has to be very careful in formulating this thought, not from cowardice but because the subject is so awe-inspiring. One thinks of all the meaningless attitudes and gestures -- in the name of God? No, in the name of habit, of tradition, custom, convenience, safety and even -- let us be honest -- in the name of middle-class respectability which is perhaps the very least suitable vehicle for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit will go on pouring forth and bringing about its work of renewal but things might have worked more smoothly if there had been no rift, no quarrels, no secession, defamation and suspicion, if the Spirit had founding living organs to work through instead of withered officials. And the obstacles are still there. Creative theology, spiritually conscious worshippers, active, effective love have yet to be achieved. Let us go back to the genuine contact and learn its laws once more; let us regain the capacity to see visions and know intuitively, moved by the Spirit. Let us give free rein to the divine instinct with which we are endowed and climb out of this morass in which we are bogged, emerge from this trance of false security. Then we shall discover the real efficacy of prayer and its power to bless and to heal.

MEDITATION/Discussion (How does "ritual", "rite" or "churchiness" stand in the way of your faith?)

6th Reading The Crux of the Matter - Now I ought to sum all this up in a pattern of behavior towards which we could be educated so that we can be capable of knowing God once more. But I am desperately short of time. I can hear the jailer already coming down the passage and besides I have no more paper. So the friend for whom these lines are intended, and any others who may one day chance to read them, will have to gather up the ends for themselves. But one thing must be said. I shall be accused of being concerned only with the "natural" life of human beings. I will not attempt to deny or disguise the fact. But God's kindness appeared in one of the Christmas messages. Without a minimum of sound humanity, genuine human dignity, and human culture, no one is capable of making contact with God. We are not even capable of ordinary understanding and behavior.

I am perfectly aware that only extraordinary grace can reawaken us and heal us; I also know that the divine impulse is forever prompting us, yearning to be allowed to do its healing work. To proclaim this is the task of those among us who still have perception and know it for the truth.

But we will not be denied God's mercy is the law of our salvation. But the main task is to render us capable and willing for the Spirit to do its work. This is even more urgent than the proclamation of the central mystery, for no one can understand this anyway until we have surrendered and opened our hearts to the will of God within us. So it may be that even this shambles in which we now live, this devastation swept by bitter winds of fate, is the destined place and hour of a new holy night, a new birth for humanity seeking God, a new nativity. Darkness shall not frighten us or distress wear us out; we will go on waiting, watching and praying until the star arises.

Meditation/Prayer (Can you dedicate yourself to not letting anything get between you and God?)

Closing Reading: ISAIAH 55:1-13

The Prison Meditations of Father Delp, Alfred Delp, S.J. (with Introduction by Thomas Merton) MacMillan, New York, 1963.

The Fourth Week of Advent

MEDITATIONS ON THE VIGIL OF CHRISTMAS

(An excerpt from Father Delp's diary: December 28th: In the course of these last long weeks life has become suddenly much less rigid. A great deal that was once quite simple and ordinary seems to have taken on a new dimension. Things seem clearer and at the same time more profound; one sees all sorts of unexpected angles. And above all God has become almost tangible. Things I have always known and believed now seem so concrete; I believe them but I also live them.

For instance how I used to mouth the words "hope" and "trust". I know now that I used them uncomprehending, like a child. And in doing so I deprived my life of much fruitfulness and achievement, and I also cheated others of many substantial blessings because I was incapable of taking really seriously God's command that we should trust absolutely and wholeheartedly in God. Only one who really believes and hopes and trusts can form any idea of humanity's real status or catch a glimpse of the divine perspective.) He was executed on January 8th.

There has always been a lot of misunderstanding about the feast of the nativity. Superficial familiarity, sentimental creche-making and so on have to some extent distorted our view of the stupendous event the feast commemorates.

The events of history in the past few years have brought home the harsh realities of life as never before. The temptation to make an idyllic myth of Christmas are less in evidence than before. Many who have spent Christmas in dugouts and foxholes that would make the stable at Bethlehem seem cozy by comparison will have little inclination to glamorize the ox and ass. They maya even stumble on the idea of asking themselves what really happened that holy night -- was the world made a better, more beautiful place? Did life acquire a blessing because the angels sang Gloria in excelsis, because the shepherds were astounded and hurried to pay homage, because a king lost his nerve and ordered innocent children to be massacred? Yet at this point the questions have already started to run wild -- for this crime took place simply and solely because it was the holy night.

Yet Christians probably never pray more fervently than when they offer up the respirare at the conclusion of the Vigil. We breathe again because the birth of the Only-Begotten will, we trust, ease our burdens. A load has been lifted from our hearts. Life takes on a new meaning because a new perspective has been disclosed, because the decisive moment has been reached again, because the relative security we normally count on has not yet been swallowed up by the uncertainties of abnormal times.

To breathe again - To be honest, I long to be able to breathe again, to be relieved of my troubles. How earnestly I prayed the prayer for speedy deliverance in yesterday's Mass. Each day I have to steel myself for the hours of daylight and each night for the hours of darkness. In between I often kneel or sit before my silent Host and talk over with him the circumstances in which I am. Without this constant contact I should have despaired long ago.

The question that applies to the whole world applies to me personally and concretely on this feast of the nativity. Is there anything different about celebrating Mass here in this narrow cell where prayers are said and tears are shed and God is known, believed in and called on? At stated hours the key grates in the lock and my wrists are put back into handcuffs; at stated hours they are taken off -- that goes on day after day, monotonously, without variation. Where does the breathing again which God makes possible come in? And the waiting and waiting for relief -- how long? And to what end?

It is necessary to celebrate the feast of the Nativity with great realism, otherwise one's imagination will conjure up magical happenings for which one's sober reason can discover no justification nor prospect. And as a result of that the celebration of the feast could easily lead to bitter disappointment and deep depression. The vigil Mass leads to the necessary restrained, expectant and realistic frame of mind in three ways:

SECOND READING: God whose coming we celebrate is and remains the God of promise - At the introit we pray: This day you shall know -- and in the morning you shall see, clearly referring to the coming feast and the connection between it and the vigil. But it also refers to a perpetual state, to the fundamental condition of our life. It is one of the most tragic and disturbing factors of our existence that we may know a great deal and have vast experience behind us and yet fail to find a place of shelter, a secure refuge. We would so like to regard our acquired knowledge as final, to make ourselves at home here and feel secure. But every now and then we grow uncomfortably aware of the fact that our wanderings are not yet over. Again and again the truth we believe we have grasped proves to be merely a prelude, an overture to something that lies beyond, beckoning and leading us onward. And we must go on, must continue our journey if we are to be given life's reward. To call a halt before the end is reached means death, metaphysical and religious ruin.

This "in the morning you shall see" absorbs the wholesome, creative unrest to which we owe all that is genuinely alive in our own makeup. But at what a price. The Lord calls it hunger and thirst after righteousness and one needs to have experienced the agony of counting hours until the next ration of bread is due really to understand what this means and how much is expected of us in this eternal quest.

And the alternative? Indifference, resignation, insensitivity, loss of appetite, the atrophying of the organs, the loss of our spiritual nerve, overstrain and deadly fatigue -- in short one of those fatal wounds through which the lifeblood of so many human beings nowadays is ebbing away. We may think we can escape the curve of tension into which the law has forced us but in the end we come to realize that burdens are part and parcel of the condition of life.

So now at the threshold of Christmas which we like to approach as though it were a kind of earthly paradise, we come to the same motif: you shall know -- you have received tidings: you shall see -- you must be on your way to find real fulfilment in real encounter. Here again we have real tension, the theme of the bow which can only be stretched when the arrow is applied to it.

We ought to remember that we are approaching the feast of God-made-human, not of humanity rendered divine. The divine mystery takes place on earth and follows that natural course of earthly events. As the epistle so emphatically states: according to the flesh--from the seed of David. It cannot be interpreted any other way. It is an indisputable but incomprehensible fact that God enters our homes, our existence, not only like us but actually as one of us. That is the unfathomable mystery. From this point on the Child is absorbed by history, becomes part of history and shares history's fate. In the darkest cells and the loneliest prisons Christ is there; is met on the high roads and in the lanes. And this is the first blessing of the burden -- Jesus is there to help us bear it. And the second blessing of it is that all we who have to bear it know at once when the strong shoulder is pushed under to relieve the weight. And the third blessing is that since that holy night when divine life and the original pattern of existence was born on earth, strength enabling us to master life has grown from that upsurge of divine vitality in human existence and is reflected in the existence of the community, to which God revealed Godself.

We shall be better able to cope with life's demands if we remain constantly aware of the directions this night provides. Let us continue our journey along the highway of life without allowing ourselves to be deterred or frightened by occasional desolate stretches. A new spirit has entered into us and we will not waver in our belief in the star of the promises or weary of acknowledging the angels Gloria even if we sometimes have tears in our eyes as we join in. Many disasters have been turned into blessings because we have risen above them.

Third Reading: LUKE 4:16-19

Meditation/Discussion (How has God/Jesus shown that there was one present whom you could lean upon in trouble. Do you need to do that leaning now? Why? Can others help you experience that ability to find help when you need it?)

God in the Christmas encounter is still the challenging God - The greatest misconceptions all center on the typical Christmas picture of God. Here too is humanity so wrapped up in appearances that the breathtaking reality of the birth of God as a human child scarcely enters our mind and the soul doesn't grasp its significance. The truth is too tremendous to be appreciated unless one concentrates on it fully. Of course the externals -- the sweetly sentimental pictures, the carols, the creches, and so on are a comfort to humanity as a whole and to the individual. But there is a great deal more to the nativity than that. The comfort we derive from the externals is only the symbol of the far greater gifts this event, and the feast commemorating it, bestowed and continue to bestow on us. Since the birth of our Lord humanity has been confirmed in the hope which turns us to God's throne for grace: God is on our side. But this does not mean that God has dethroned Godself any more than it means that our lives have been turned into a primrose path by that stupendous event.

We need to look critically at this tendency to sentimentalize the divine attributes by personifying them in the person of an innocent child or by over-beautifying the figure of the adult Jesus. The glamorizing of the nativity story, the lowering of the whole tone of Christ's life to the level of a baroque sermon full of portentous warnings and grave moralizings has contributed quite

a lot to the West's present helplessness in the face of conditions that keep it fettered and restrained. Certainly God became human -- a human being among human beings -- but nevertheless God, creator of all the universe. Therefore we, the created being, must approach this God-made-us with reverence and adoration, subjugating ourselves in order to find ourselves -- it is the only way.

The vigil points out how we ought to approach this feast. Whoever enters into the divine way of life automatically comes under divine guidance. That, as far as the worshipper is concerned, means that the nearer we get to God the more we long to return there for it is essentially a homecoming. God's nearness has dynamic power. As worshippers, we may know by the state of unrest into which we are thrown by this attraction just how much we have grasped of the secret relationship between God and us.

And the vigil further prevents our becoming bemused by the over-glamorized picture of the divine Child by pointing out another fundamental relationship between God and us. The collect reminds us suddenly and unexpectedly that the child in fact is already sitting in judgment over our lives. The increased capacity for life which comes from understanding this warning, the awakened sense of responsibility, remains with us long after Christmas is over provided we have entered the vigil in the proper spirit. And if we remember that the divine Child is already engaged in the serious business of judging the world how many of the people who represent the human race today can honestly approach the crib? Most of them don't even want to. The small and narrow door will not admit those who come riding on a high horse. But simple shepherds have no difficulty in getting through. The star leads the regal wise men to it but the arrogance of Jerusalem is thrown into a panic by the Child. How much there is in our lives today that cannot face the Child. How different our individual lives would be if only we realized that the world's supreme hour struck that midnight when Almighty God condescended to come among us as a little child. We should not behave so greedily, so arrogantly, so highhandedly to one another if we did.

Every hour of our Lord's life from the crib to the Cross by which we were redeemed is a judgment on some part of our existence. That is why we are often so defeated and so in trouble. But the last hour was a resurrection, a glorious homecoming, for both Christ and for us. We ought to take the Christ Child very seriously.

Meditation/Discussion: (Silently think of the things which God is judging in <u>your</u> life in light of Jesus' teachings and life. What can you do to change that? How can you become more obedient to the Word made flesh?)

<u>God whose coming we joyfully await is still the God of judgment</u> - It is no easy or light matter to face the scrutiny of the divine Judge. Obedience to the Word which has to be the basis of our lives increases our responsibility. But even that is not the end. Over and above rules are the entirely personal twists and turns of fate through which God intervenes in the lives of individuals. And so often God seems to leave us alone with our burden to cope with our troubles as best we can.

Let us reread the Gospel from a purely human angle -- looking at this episode in their lives from a purely human point of view:

Fourth Reading:

We know how it all ended so it doesn't disturb us, but at the time there must have been a great deal of heartache. Joseph's belief in a trusted human being was shattered -- but what must Mary herself have gone through? She had dedicated herself to God -- her submission was complete and unreserved. She had received the Word in a way no other human being would ever share. And then God became silent. She must have felt society's questioning eyes following her; she must have known the torment Joseph was going through and the blow his sense of justice had received. And God left her alone in this hour with all the weight of her trouble pressing on her. From a purely human point of view what a terrible position to be in.

And what about our own fate? We have heart the promises and believed in the messages and accepted the prophecies. And then something unexpected happens and our life is twisted out of shape -- human life is subject to that sort of thing, even the life of Christians. Ought it to be different in their case? It isn't. And it is precisely when we come up against occurrences like this that our faith is put to the real test. To adhere steadfastly to the Word even when we strike our foot against a stone, even when we feel we are beaten, even when we are fastened in chains and handcuffs -- that is the answer. And that is the answer that will be expected when each of us is questioned at the seat of judgment; no one can escape it. God is posing that very question to us today in a hundred different ways and we have to see to it that we have the right answers. Steadfastness is not an easy virtue to acquire, but it makes us fit to meet our Maker and it opens our eyes to the actual reality of God.

Once we honestly try to acquire it the face of the whole world is changed. The stark features of unavoidable accident, of logical consequence and necessity are softened. The world and life take on a more friendly look -- they seem to assume almost parental compassion. The thousand and one small blessings which God takes delight in showering on humanity begin to reveal God's nearness to us. Outwardly things are just as before and yet something has happened -- there is a new consciousness of God's parental care in those who have stood the test of God's questions. Suddenly we discover that events are not impersonal and universal but that they have more than one meaning. In the personal dialogue between God and us which is the whole point of life, achievements have meanings quite different from those usually attributed to them. And what one person regards as trivial everyday occurrences are to another blessed signs of God's mercy and guidance.

Meditation/Discussion (Out of some difficulty which you may be experiencing, what guidance could God be trying to give you? How, in that problem, could God be speaking to <u>you</u>?)

Fifth Reading: ISAIAH 11:1-10

<u>To breathe again</u> - That brings us back to <u>respirare</u>, the deep breath of relief which can, and should bring ease. Nothing has happened to the world but it is now the ark of God which no storm can overturn, no flood can wreck. Life has not shaken off its laws or lost its tension but the Lord has subdued it, made sense of it all.

The very tensions are harnessed now to increase the strength and power of humanity.

And there is one other thing -- we are no longer on our own. Monologue has never been able to make our lives happy and healthy; we are only genuinely alive when we are engaged in dialogue. All mono-tendencies are evil. But by bringing the God-imposed tensions and burdens into the dialogue the most terrible of all human maladies -- loneliness -- is overcome. From that point there are no more starless nights, no more days of solitary confinement, no more lonely paths or pitfalls without companionship or guidance. God with us. That was the promise, that was what we prayed for and cried out for. In God's own way, in the natural course of things, far more simply but also far more effectively than we could ever have imagined, God came to us as our ally.

We must not try to shirk the burdens imposed on us. They are God's way of communicating with us and they are God's blessing. Whever is true to life, however hard and barren it may seem at the moment, will discover within fountains of real refreshment. The world will give you more than you ever imagined possible. The silver threads of God's mystery will begin to sparkle visibly in everything around you and there will be a song in your heart. Your burdens will turn to blessings because you will recognize them a coming from God and welcome them as such.

God becomes human but humanity does not become divine. The human order remains unchanged with the same obligations. But it has acquired a blessing and we have grown in stature, have become stronger, mightier. Let us trust in life because this night will pass and a new day will dawn. Let us trust in life because we do not have to live through it alone. God is with us.

Meditation/Discussion (What are some of ways you are aware that God is with you? Can you share with each other some of the experiences when God's presence has been made manifest to you?)

Final Reading: Luke 2:1-19

Closing Prayer

UNIVERSAL FELLOWSHIP OF METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCHES

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH of BOSTON
131 CAMBRIDGE STREET
BOSTON, MA 02114
REV. MARGE RAGONA, PASTOR
(617) 523-7664

In the event that you have missed this, we pass along the penultimate Christmas story. It is called "A Scripture Lesson for Advent" and is from a book called The Collected Writings of Saint Hereticus.

Once upon a time God lived at the North Pole. He wanted little boys and girls to be happy and have lots of good times. But if they wanted toys, they had to be good. So God sent a spaceman to tell the shepherds not to be afraid, because even though Herod was going to kill all the little babies, Santa Claus was coming to town. Next week on the ABC television network the three wise men watched the baby Jesus coming to earth in a spaceship that was so bright it looked like a star. They followed the spaceship for a long time. But they didn't get tired, because they came in a sled that was drawn by three camels named Prancer and Donder and Blitzen, and the sled went jingle, jingle, jingle, all the way. The noise frightened the shepherds' sheep, who started to run, and the pilot leaned out of the spaceship to tell the shepherds not to spank their sheep, because this would make them sore afraid.

He said if they went to Bethlehem Steel, they could see Jesus in a manger with an electric light bulb in it to keep the baby from getting cold. But the baby in the manger was only a doll, so it didn't matter.

The kings finally got there and had presents for the baby. One had some gold from Fort Knox, and another king named Frank Incense gave Jesus "murr," or something. The shepherds didn't see the spacemen anymore, but they decked the hall where Jesus was with boughs of holly, so that if bad Herod went there, he would prick his finger and die.

But Santa Claus got down the chimney before Herod had a dream, and left a bowlful of jelly for Mary and Joseph, because they couldn't get into the hotel for supper. Mary was great with child, so she was the baby sitter while Joseph went to the garage and got the donkey. Then they took a trip to the desert so Jesus could play with the sand toys Santa Claus had left, and then Santa Claus gave them a ride over the Red Sea in his sleigh so that the Egyptians wouldn't drown them.

Then God went back to the North Pole until next Christmas and took off his red suit and made some more toys. But it's always Christmas for Dad if he gets a carton of filter cigarettes that draw better than all other leading brands. Impartial tests show. And the shepherds were late getting back to their flocks, because they were keeping their watch by night and couldn't see what time it said. But they left a special message for us about telling Mom to go down to the friendly neighborhood grocer and buy a giant economy box of Zuz, with a platic wind-up angel inside absolutely free, complete with launching platform.

Since Jesus gave presents to all the animals, we ought to give presents even to our aunts and uncles. He liked all the animals in the manger, because they were wearing swaddling clothes to keep warm, and there was a donkey and a cow and a horse and two sheep and a bear and a lion and a hippopotamus and a pushmepullyou, and all the people wore clothes made from old living room curtains.

Herod's other name was Scrooge.

Advent -- especially for us who have been through the study of Embodiment -- is a time when we recall that God became embodied (incarnate) for our sakes; and at this season we think of the God who chose to dwell among us, taking on our human form that we might know God, and come close to that God. How many of us today would accept finding God in a bin in a garage -- born to some kind of mechanic? Or would all of our concepts of "decency and good order" be upset by God's presence in a class other than ours, possibly of a race other than ours, and speaking a language other than ours. Too many times we look for God in <u>our</u> image, rather than reminding ourselves that we are in God's image.

May your Christmas be rewarding, full of warm human contact, and surrounded by the love of those whom you love -- but remember, too, that there are those who are needy, alone, and friendless. Reach out, each in your own way, to touch the life of someone you might otherwise ignore. Give a little of yourself to someone who needs friendship more than a tangible gift; give a word of comfort to one who is troubled; give time to someone who is lonely; and give yourself the gift of replenished faith at this Christmas season -- so that you will have more of yourself to give to others and more of yourself for yourself.

As your pastor, I wish you peace, love, and joy -- and with that the expectation of the coming of Christ in your life. God is with us, let us rejoice.

ADVENT BOOK STUDY - For four weeks (Wednesdays at 7:30), the church will be studying and experiencing <u>The Prison Meditations of Father Delp</u>. Delp was a Jesuit who was imprisoned during World War II and executed only because he was a Christian. He spent Advent in prison and was executed at Epiphany. His experiences during those weeks are recorded in his diary and meditations. The book is now out of print, but we have duplicated portions of the diary and meditations -- and with some appropriate scripture -- we will be trying to make Advent and human liberation come together. We invite anyone who is interested to join us for this study, these meditations, and quiet discussion of what it means to be a Christian in an oppressive society, and how we can help to change ourselves and that society, through our faith. I cannot promise you a <u>joyful</u> time -- I can promise some serious scrutiny of what Christmas means in the light of liberation. Come and join us.

CHRISTMAS DINNER - Some of us will be having Christmas dinner at the church in the parlor. We are doing this so that anyone who has no where to go on Christmas day can come and join us. Don't be alone. Come and share with our church family.

Rev. Patti Clarke, is available for short- and longterm counseling, by appointment. She is presently a doctoral candidate in pastoral counseling.

NEWS WE HAVE NOT GOTTON TO EARLIER: At our congregational meeting, Bob Stevens was elected to the Board (Vestry), giving us a full Board again with Treasurer Ernie Lessa, Clerk Jim Hayes, Assistant Treasurer Ron Rouse, and members Martha Knutson, Alice Thompson, Paul Barstow, and Bob Stevens. Elizabeth Ragona was elected our delegate to District Conference. An annual budget of $17,000+ was passed; a lean budget but with 5% of all income going to social action causes.

DISTRICT CONFERENCE: New York MCC was the host of the conference with excellent workshops led by Rene McCoy on Racism. Particularly interesting was a workshop in which we were invited to imagine ourselves as either a Hebrew or an Egyptian and deal with ourselves as an oppressor or one of the oppressed, depending upon our race. It was an enlightening experience. The food, thanks to Rev. Shelley Hamilton, was excellently cooked and served vegetarian cooking, and Shelley's breads were particularly delicious. Rev. Hamilton is currently pastoring Alpha & Omega MCC in Brooklyn -- and we hear their potlucks are very good eating! (And now we know why!) On a more serious note, we were informed that neither Rev. McCoy nor Rev. Jose Mojica, who were both voted funds from General Conference, have received any monies due to the cash flow problems of the Fellowship -- which completely goes against the intent of the Conference that Racism and the Hispanic Ministries both need and deserve our support. Also, the District Conference passed a resolution requesting the Fellowship to find more inexpensive housing and assembling space (preferably at a University) for General Conference. The Shamrock-Hilton was excessively expensive for many of our members, many did not stay there, and the Fellowship was penalized by the hotel because we did not bring in the amount of rentals which would have fulfilled our contractual obligations to the hotel. Fiscal responsibility means growing up and not spending more than you can afford. We are not gay adolescents ---- we are Christian adults, and we need to behave like it.

NEW STUDY GROUPS IN OUR DISTRICT: Rochester, N.Y., and Harlem, N.Y.C. were both passed as study groups at District Conference. Rene McCoy pastors Harlem, and Willie White pastors Rochester. Rev. Billie Edwards has been elected pastor at Worcester and will be coming in the early spring. We had a chance to meet her at Houston, and she will be an asset to our District, as is Rev. Willie White.

CHRISTMAS OFFERINGS: Our church family is invited to bring supplies for the Old West Drop-In Center (macaroni, tomato products, peanut butter, jelly, rice) preferably in sizes that will be usable for mass feeding. These will be our Christmas gift to the Center, to help our host church keep its commitment to the homeless and hungry of this city.

We also invite any of you who have been part of MCC in the past and who are now back in your own denominational churches, or not in church at all, to remember when MCC was important either on your faith journey or in your process of coming out and dealing with your sexuality -- whatever it may be -- to remember MCC's place in that process with a Christmas gift. Each of us makes the way a little easier for the person who comes behind us, and each of us has a responsibility to say "Thank you, God," for the blessings we now enjoy. Give, that we may continue to give to others.

DECEMBER CALENDAR

Sun	Mon	Tues	Wednesday	Thurs	Fri.	Sat.
29 1st Sunday in Advent Rev. Patty Clarke preaching	30	1 Counseling by appt.	7:30 2 Prison Meditations of Father Delp	3 Counseling by appt.	4	5
6 2nd Sunday in Advent Rev. John Coyle preaching	7	8 Counseling by appt.	7:30 9 Prison Meditations of Father Delp	10 Counseling by appt.	11	12
13 3rd Sunday in Advent Rev, Ragona preaching	14	15 Counseling by appt.	7:30 16 Prison Meditations of Father Delp	17 Counseling by appt.	18	19
20 4th Sunday in Advent Rev. Ragona, Preaching "Some Day My Prince Will Come - The Gospel of Cinderella"	21	22 Counseling by appt.	7:30 23 Prison Meditations of Father Delp	24 Christmas Eve Service	25 Christmas Dinner in church parlor 3:00pm	26
Laity Service 27	28	29 Counseling by appt.	30	31 New Year's Eve Party.	1	2
3	4	5	7:30 6 Homosexuality and the Bible (5 sessions) (also 1/13,20,27 &2/6)	7	8	9

GAUDETE

Rejoice in
the LORD
always!
again I say
rejoice!
Let your
moderation
be known
to all
The LORD
is near!

An Advent Procession
of Lessons and Carols

December 2, 1990 at 4:30 p.m.

The Cathedral of St. Philip
Atlanta, Georgia

OPENING VOLUNTARY

Chorale Prelude on *Est ist ein' Ros' entsprungen* — Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

MATIN RESPONSORY AT THE WEST DOOR

Cantor: I look from afar:
and lo, I see the power of God coming, and a cloud covering the whole earth.
Go ye out to meet him and say:

Choir: Tell us, art thou he that should come to reign over thy people Israel?

Cantor: High and low, rich and poor, one with another.

Choir: Go ye out to meet him and say:

Cantor: Hear, O thou Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a sheep.

Choir: Tell us, art thou he that should come?

Women: Stir up thy strength, O Lord, and come.

Choir: To reign over thy people Israel.

Cantor: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.

Choir: I look from afar... Thy people Israel?

Music adapted from
G.P. da Palestrina
(c. 1525-1594)

AT THE PROCESSION, HYMN *Veni, Redemptor gentium*

(The Choir sings the first two stanzas, the congregation joining them for the remainder of the Hymn)

Come, thou Redeemer of the earth,
And manifest thy virgin birth;
Let ev'ry age adoring fall;
Such birth befits the God of all.

Begotten of no human will,
But of the Spirit, thou art still
The Word of God in flesh arrayed,
The promised fruit to man displayed.

(Congregation and Choir)

From God the Father he proceeds,
To God the Father back he speeds;
His course he runs to death and hell,
Returning on God's throne to dwell.

O equal to thy Father, thou!
Gird on thy fleshly mantle now;
The weakness of our mortal state
With deathless might invigorate.

Thy cradle here shall glitter bright,
And darkness breathe a newer light,
Where endless faith shall shine serene,
And twilight never intervene.

All Laud, eternal Son, to thee
Whose advent sets thy people free,
Whom with the Father we adore,
And Holy Ghost forever more.

Words: St. Ambrose
(340-397)
Music: Traditional melody
Arr. David Willcocks
(b. 1919)

A BIDDING PRAYER Dean Sanders

THE FIRST LESSON Genesis 3:1-15

Adam and Eve rebel against God.

Reader: Grady J. Crawford, Jr.
Adult Acolyte

CHOIR CAROL

Adam lay ybounden,
Bounden in a bond;
Four thousand winter
Thought he not too long.

And all was for an apple,
An apple that he took,
As clerkës finden
Written in their book.

Ne had the apple taken been,
The apple taken been,
Ne had never our lady
Abeen heav'në queen.

Blessed be the time
That apple taken was,
Therefore we moun singen,
Deo gracias!

Words: Anonymous 15th century
Music: Robert Walker, 1973

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN *Merton*

Hark! a thrilling voice is sounding;
"Christ is nigh," it seems to say;
"Cast away the works of darkness,
O ye children of the day."

Wakened by the solemn warning,
Let the earth-bound soul arise;
Christ, her sun, all sloth dispelling,
Shines upon the morning skies.

Lo! the Lamb, so long expected,
Comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow,
One and all to be forgiven;

So when next he comes with glory,
And the world is wrapped in fear,
May he with his mercy shield us,
And with words of love draw near.

Honor, glory, might, and blessing
To the Father, and the Son,
With the everlasting Spirit
While unending ages run.

Words: 6th century origin
Music: William Henry Monk
(1823-1889)

THE SECOND LESSON Isaiah 40:1-8

The Prophet Isaiah proclaims good news
to a people in exile.

Reader: Chris Johnston, President
St. Philip Cathedral Choir

CHOIR CAROL

Remember, O thou man,
O thou man, O thou man,
Remember O thou man, Thy time is spent:
Remember, O thou man,
How thou cam'st to me then,
And I did what I can, therefore repent.

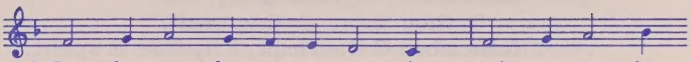
Remember God's goodness,
O thou man, O thou man,
Remember God's goodness and promise
made:
Remember God's goodness,
How his only Son he sent,
Our sins for to redress, be not afraid.

In Bethlehem was he born
O thou man, O thou man,
In Bethlehem he was born,
For mankind dear:
In Bethlehem was he born
For us that were forlorn,
And therefore took no scorn,
Our sins to bear.

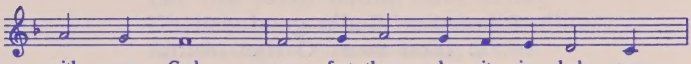
Words: 16th century
Music: Thomas Ravenscroft
(1590-1633)

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN

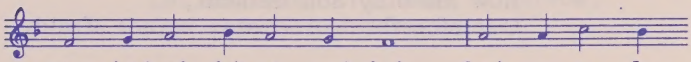
Psalm 42



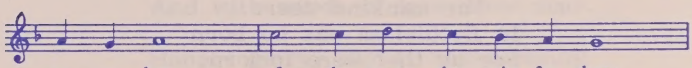
1 Com - fort, com - fort ye my peo - ple, speak ye peace, thus
2 Hark, the voice of one that cri - eth in the des - ert
3 Make ye straight what long was crook - ed, make the rough - er



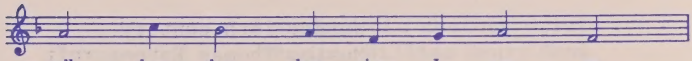
saith our God; com - fort those who sit in dark - ness
far and near, call - ing us to new re - pent - ance
pla - ces plain; let your hearts be true and hum - ble,



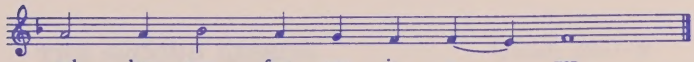
mourn - ing 'neath their sor - rows' load. Speak ye to Je -
since the king - dom now is here. Oh, that warn - ing
as be - fits his ho - ly reign. For the glo - ry



ru - sa - lem of the peace that waits for them;
cry o - bey! Now pre - pare for God a way;
of the Lord now o'er earth is shed a - broad;



tell her that her sins I cov - er,
let the val - leys rise to meet him
and all flesh shall see the to - ken



and her war - fare now is o - ver.
and the hills bow down to greet him.
that the word is nev - er bro - ken.

Words: Johann G. Olearius (1611-1684); tr. Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878), alt.
Music: *Psalm 42*, melody Claude Goudimel (1514-1572)

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THE THIRD LESSON Zechariah 9:9-10

The Lord promises that the King
will come to Israel in peace.

READER: Meredith Stacy
Lector and DOK Altar Chairman

CHOIR CAROL

King Jesus hath a garden, full of diverse flowers,
Where I go culling posies gay, all times and hours.

There naught is heard but Paradise bird,
Harp, dulcimer, lute,
With cymbal, trump and tymbal,
And the tender, soothing flute.

The Lily, white in blossom there, is Chastity:
The Violet, with sweet perfume, Humility.
Refrain

The bonny Damask-rose is known as Patience:
The blithe and thrifty Marygold, Obedience.
Refrain

The Crown Imperial bloometh too in yonder place,
'Tis Charity, of stock divine, the flower of grace.
Refrain

Ah! Jesu Lord, my heal and weal, my bliss complete,
Make thou my heart thy garden-plot,
fair trim and neat.

That I may hear this musick clear:
Harp, dulcimer, lute,
With cymbal, trump and tymbal,
And the tender, soothing flute.

Words: Tr. G.R. Woodward
(1848-1934)
Harm: Charles Wood
(1866-1926)

THE FOURTH LESSON Isaiah 7:10-15

God promises that a child will be conceived and known as, "God with Us".

READER: Frances Talmadge, President
Episcopal Church Women

CHOIR CAROL

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel. O come, thou Wisdom from on high, who orderest all things mightily; to us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go. O come, thou Branch of Jesse's tree, free them from Satan's tyranny that trust thy mighty power to save, and give them victory o'er the grave; O come, thou Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home; make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery. O come, desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind; bid thou our sad divisions cease, and be thyself our King of Peace.

(Sung in Latin)

Words: 9th century origin
Music: Zoltan Kodaly
(1882-1967)

THE FIFTH LESSON Luke 1:26-38

The Angel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary that she will bear the Son of the Most High.

READER: Dennis Hall
Junior Warden

CHOIR CAROL

A maiden most gentle and tender we sing:
Of Mary the mother of Jesus our King.
Ave Maria. How blessed is the birth of her
heavenly child, who came to redeem us in
Mary so mild. Ave Maria. The Archangel
Gabriel foretold by his call the Lord of
creation, and Saviour of all. Ave Maria.
Rejoice and be glad at this Advent we pray;
Sing praise to the Saviour, sing endless
'Ave'. Ave Maria.

Words: The Venerable Bede
(673-735)
Music: French tune
arr. Andrew Carter, 1978

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN *Richmond*

Hark! the glad sound!
the Savior comes,
the Savior promised long;
let every heart prepare a throne,
and every voice a song.

He comes, the prisoners to release,
in Satan's bondage held;
the gates of brass before him burst,
the iron fetters yield.

He comes, the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure;
and with the treasures of his grace
to enrich the humble poor.

Our glad hosannas,
Prince of peace,
thy welcome shall proclaim,
and heaven's eternal arches ring
with thy beloved Name.

Words: Philip Doddridge
(1702-1751)
Music: Thomas Haweis
(1734-1820)

THE SIXTH LESSON

Matthew 1:18-23

An angel appears to Joseph and foretells the birth of Jesus.

READER: David Fishburn
Associate Organist

CHOIR CAROL

Let folly praise that fancy loves, I praise and love that Child, whose heart no thought, whose tongue no word, whose hand no deed defiled. I praise him most, I love him best, all praise and love is his; while him I love, in him I live, and cannot live amiss.

Love's sweetest mark, laud's highest theme, man's most desired light. He mine by gift, I His by debt, thus each to other due, first friend He was, best friend He is, all time will try Him true.

Though young, yet wise, though small, yet strong; though man, yet God he is; as wise He knows, as strong He can, as God He loves to bliss. His knowledge rules, His strength defends, His love doth cherish all; His birth our joy, His life our light, His death our end of thrall.

Alas! He weeps, He sighs, He pants, yet do His angels sing; out of his tears, His sighs and throbs, doth bud a joyful spring. Almighty Babe, whose tender arms can force all foes to fly, correct my faults, protect my life, direct me when I die.

Words: Robert Southwell
(1561-1595)
Music: Richard Dirksen
(b. 1921)

THE SEVENTH LESSON Mark 1:1-15

Jesus proclaims the coming of the kingdom of God.

READER: The Very Reverend John C. Sanders
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

CHOIR CAROL

The first good joy that Mary had,
It was the joy of one;
To see the blessed Jesus Christ when he was
First her son:
When he was first her son,
good man: And blessed may
he be, both Father, Son and
Holy Ghost, to all eternity.

The next good joy that Mary had,
It was the joy of two;
To see her own son, Jesus Christ,
To make the lame to go:

The next good joy that Mary had,
It was the joy of three;
To see her own son, Jesus Christ,
To make the blind to see:

The next good joy that Mary had,
It was the joy of four;
To see her own son, Jesus Christ,
To read the bible o'er:

The next good joy that Mary had,
It was the joy of five;
To see her own son, Jesus Christ,
To bring the dead alive:

The next good joy that Mary had,
It was the joy of six;
To see her own son, Jesus Christ,
Upon the crucifix:

The next good joy that Mary had,
It was the joy of heaven;
To see her own son, Jesus Christ,
To wear the crown of heaven:

Words: Traditional
Music: Traditional melody
arr. Stephen Cleobury
(b. 1948)

CONGREGATIONAL HYMN *Winchester New*

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of kings.

Then cleansed be every breast from sin;
Make straight the way of God within,
And let each heart prepare a home
Where such a mighty guest may come.

For thou art our salvation, Lord,
Our refuge, and our great reward;
Without thy grace we waste away
Like flowers that wither and decay.

To heal the sick stretch out thine hand,
And bid the fallen sinner stand;
Shine forth, and let thy light restore
Earth's own true loveliness once more.

All praise, eternal Son, to thee,
Whose advent doth thy people free;
Whom with the Father we adore
And Holy Ghost for evermore.

Words: Charles Coffin
(1676-1749)
Harm: William Henry Monk
(1823-1889)

THE VESPER RESPONSORY (Spoken)

Priest: Judah and Jerusalem, fear not, nor be dismayed.

People: Tomorrow go ye forth, and the Lord, He will be with you.

Priest: Stand ye still, and ye shall see the salvation of the Lord.

People: Tomorrow go ye forth, and the Lord He will be with you.

Priest: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.

People: Tomorrow go ye forth, and the Lord, He will be with you.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Priest: We wait for Thy loving kindness, O Lord.

People: In the midst of Thy temple.

COLLECT FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

THE BLESSING

Open wide, O Lord, the gates of heaven and visit Thy people in peace; send forth Thy Spirit from on high that their hearts may be uplifted unto Thee.

O Lord, who for our sake was of a virgin born, make holy Thy people, and bless Thine heritage.

And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be amongst you and abide with you forever. Amen.

AT THE PROCESSION, HYMN

Stuttgart

Come thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art:
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child, and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Words: Charles Wesley
(1707-1788)
Harm: William Henry Havergal
(1793-1870)

The Celebration of the Holy Eucharist,
beginning on page 333 of the Book of Common Prayer,
follows immediately.

Those who do not wish to receive Communion
are asked to leave reverently.

THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. PHILIP
in the City and Diocese of Atlanta
The Right Reverend Frank K. Allan, Bishop
The Very Reverend John C. Sanders, Dean
Robert L. Simpson, Organist-Choirmaster
David M. Fishburn, Associate Organist

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES - II

Christmas celebrates the mystery of contact with God. Those who are part of the approach to it can show us the requirements which will make it possible for us to once more converse with God, and the conditions necessary if we are to reestablish contact with God. Let us listen for the angels who sing songs of joy and praise. Let us hear the tidings from God, for they announce God's mystery and summon us to adoration. Let us rejoice in the afterglow of the divine reality. Christ dwells among us. Glory be to God on high. Let us proclaim God joyfully.

From: The Prison Meditations of Father Delp.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES - III

Why do so few ever see the star? Because most people are not looking for it! Only one who really believes and hopes and trusts can catch a glimpse of the divine perspective. Yet when we become aware that God indeed loves us, when we can accept the fact that God is on our side, only then can we know the depth of love which passes human understanding. We will find then that a load has been lifted from our hearts, and life has taken on new meaning. We discover in the love of God that we are better able to cope with life's demands, because a new spirit has entered into us and we can sing Gloria with the angels even with tears in our eyes. Many disasters turn into blessings because they open to us the depth of love, human and Godlike which shelters us. God's love has dynamic power, and asks only one thing of us in return, that we love God.

From: The Prison Meditations of Father Delp.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES - III

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From: The Prison Meditations of Father Delp.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES - I

Long, Long Ago

Wind through the olive trees
Softly did blow,
Round little Bethlehem
Long, long ago.

Sheep on the hillside lay
Whiter than snow;
Shepherds stood watching them,
Long, long ago.

Then from the happy sky,
Angels bent low
Singing their songs of joy,
Long, long ago.

For in a manger bed,
Cradled we know,
Christ came to Bethlehem,
Long, long ago.

Auther unknown

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES - I

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Author unknown

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES - I

Advent means "coming." It is a time of coming closer to Christmas and of coming closer to the Christ. God came closer to the people by sending Jesus into the world. We draw closer to God in worship, but mainly we draw closer in hope. Let us have patience and wait in the spirit of Advent for that hour in which it shall be pleasing for God to be revealed anew. A radiant fulfilment is coming, and we can hear the first tentative notes of jubilation. It is not yet a full chorus, but only an indication, a hint far away; but it is drawing nearer. This is all that we know for today, but tomorrow the event will be joyfully proclaimed, and we will be happy if we have believed and faithfully trusted in the Advent of the Christ. With that thought in mind, we hope.

From: The Prison Meditations of Father Delp.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES - IV
God with Us

There were three lights that night:
The star above the darkness, crystal fair,
The foremost angel's garment flaming white,
   The baby's circled hair.

Three sounds upon the hill:
A sudden song; low drawn, a woman's sigh;
And, when the midnight deepend grey and chill
   A little, little cry.

Three woes: a witless lamb
Lost from the scattered flock; its mother
  grieving;
The long, deep slumber of the townfold--
  blind
  And deaf, and unbelieving.

Three wonders: dark-browed kings
Riding from far; young shepherds lifted
  faces;
The silver beauty raining from the star
  On Bethlehem's dark places.

There were Faith, Hope and Love:
Faith that had known; Hope that waited well,
Love that had wrought; and in their trembling
  midst,
  Immanuel!

Nancy Turner Byrd

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES - II

Star Silver

The silver of one star
Plays cross-lights against pine green.

And the pay of this silver
crosswise against the green
is an old story...
        thousands of years.

And sheep raisers on the hills by night
Watching the wooly four-footed ramblers,
Watching a single silver star--
Why does the story never wear out?

And a baby slung in a feed-box
Back in a barn in a Bethlehem slum,
And the baby's first cry mixing with the
   crunch
Of an ass's teeth on Bethlehem Christmas
   corn,

Baby fists softer than snowflakes,
The vagabond Mother of Christ
And the vagabond men of wisdom,
All in a barn on a winter nigh,
And a baby there is swaddling clothes on
   hay--
Why does the story never wear out?

The sheen of it all
is a star silver and a pine green
For the heart of a child asksing a story
The red and hungry, red and hankering heart
Calling for cross-lights of silver and green.

Carl Sandburg

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES - IV

The God whose coming we celebrate is and remains the God of promise. Too often we live out our entire lives without finding a place of shelter, a secure refuge. We would like to feel at home and cease our wanderings. Now at the threshold of Christmas we feel the same tension. We would like this season to continue all year long. Our peace in life is only secured when we understand that we are not alone; Jesus is here with us, Jesus will help us bear all our burdens. We will know at once when the strong shoulder is placed under our burdens to help us bear them. Strength enabling us to master life grows from that divine vitality and is reflected in our existence. Jesus is here with us. Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. What peace is ours! Let us continue our journey undeterred or frightened by desolate stretches, now and always Jesus is with us. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let us remember that peace that is with us now and forever.

From: The Prison Meditations of Father Delp.

In MCC we keep the "Christian Year" which has "seasons" just like the calendar year. Each season has a color and certain symbols associated with it.

On this first Sunday in December, we enter a new season, Advent, from the Latin words ad. venire, "to come to." The message of Advent is that Christ is coming, and as Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem, as shepherds came to the manger, and as three kings came to find Jesus, so we come, too. It is a past experience, since Christ came at Christmas; it is a present experience, in that God comes to us as a rebirth; and it is a future experience, in that Christ will return unpredictably at the end of the world.

Advent opens the church year and is one of the oldest church seasons. The color associated with Advent is blue, which exemplifies hope. The symbols associated with Advent include a star -- a simple four-pointed star, which stands for the star the magi followed to the stable; trumpets, representing the herald angels who announced the birth of the Messiah; and candles, which are the colors of all the liturgical seasons and stand for the Sundays in Advent and the four themes, hope, joy, love, and peace.

During Advent, we display a wreath, a custom which came to us through Scandinavian Lutherans; the wreath has four candles. A new candle is lighted each Sunday along with the candles of the previous Sundays, and they, too, stand for the four themes of Advent. Let us watch, wait, hope and expect the Christ to come among us this Advent. Then let us rejoice, for God is with us.

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The Paradox of Christmas

PREPARED BY H.R.
DATE 12/20/89

ACTION NOTES | PLANNING NOTES

John 3:1-18

I heard the Bells

What it's all about

We around us we see and hear the secular sights and sounds of Christmas. Our every Christmas fantasy is some store's reality; every carol ever written has been played on every instrument invented & regarded by every singer who ever sang and broadcast in every store & stereo, and it's been going on since Halloween and certainly gets earlier year by year as the merchants pray & work for a financial miracle and Christians desperately try to remember and coin cute phrases like "Jesus is the reason for the season" to remind ourselves why the annual frenzy. We are looking forward to the birth of Jesus. But wait a minute, There's a paradox here, and Nicodemus is important to our understanding of this Christmas paradox. When I toss ten + Barry the little of my message they said I'd have to explain the word "paradox." A paradox is a statement that contradicts itself, it is something which is incredible - yet it is true. The paradox of Christmas is that we await again the birth of Jesus - but it is not Jesus who is being born again - it is me / and when we experience that sense of rebirth then Jesus is truly reborn - for he is born in us. So the paradox of Christmas

PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES		PLANNING NOTES
	1	
	2	
	3	
	4	
	5	
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	7	
	8	
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TIME SCHEDULE

SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE

executive®

PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES

PLANNING NOTES

is that Jesus is not truly being born again but he is, truly!

I do not come from the Christian tradition which keeps Advent – as a matter of fact I come from exactly the opposite tradition – the one that rejects the Church year and all its rituals & traditions, and I have a son who belongs to a group which takes that stance so literally that like the old Puritans they do not keep Christmas. (and Easter)
But I have learned in MCC at least a recapturing, a restructuring + a reparking – LIKE DYKE FAGGOT – and that there is a real and important truth, sometimes embedded in ~~all~~ an old traditions. Advent was for the medieval mind a kind of winter but yet a time of joyful expectation – not so much somber as introspective a time to look at ourselves and who and what we are at this moment in our lives, and how the rebirth of Jesus impacts us.

I chose the scripture passage about Nicodemus because in a sense he is a model for the gay Christian. First, he's in the closet! (As a Christian), Second – He's trying to come out to Jesus and third – Jesus gives him the authority – the

& because it is full of good words about birth and rap/something about humanity in general –

PAGE NO.	

PREPARED BY	
DATE	

ACTION NOTES		PLANNING NOTES
	1	
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	4	
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TIME SCHEDULE

SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE

PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES | PLANNING NOTES

Holy Spirit's moving - to be who he is. All of those are important steps in our spiritual growth.

I'd like to look at the scripture passage Nicodemus comes flattering Jesus; after all, he's a Pharisee - he's the authority - he's supposed to have all the answers - "We all know that God has sent you - we have seen your miracles -

We want to be on the Good side of God, and our prayers flatter God - No? We haul out all our superlatives. Can you imagine Jesus listening to our prayers! And he does to Nicodemus what he does with us - he cuts through the nonsense with "You can't see anything!" Most of all you won't see the K of H because you must be born again to get into the Dominion of God.

Nicodemus doesn't understand rebirth. Rebirths are those times in ~~your~~ our life when a radical change takes place. I learned my doctrine from the Baptists who taught us "Once saved always saved", and it took my going to a Methodist seminary to have that upgraded. We are always being reborn, we are always being converted, we are

Christians ~~people~~ we want to be on God's side

As any ~~people~~ Christians an absurdity that if we're not on God's side that we are on God's side

Oh God we can see your majesty in the works you have created...

Most of us don't

We coming on

PAGE NO.	

PREPARED BY	
DATE	

ACTION NOTES		PLANNING NOTES
	1	
	2	
	3	
	4	
	5	
	6	
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	26	

TIME SCHEDULE

SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE

executive®

Prayer — Reed

Offering — ~~Freedie~~

Message — Marge

Comm. — ~~Buddy~~

2nd — Marge

PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES		PLANNING NOTES
	1	
	2	
	3	
	4	
	5	
	6	
	7	
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TIME SCHEDULE

SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE

executive®

PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES

PLANNING NOTES

Human life can only reproduce human life. The body can only reproduce the body* - I'm talking about the soul. Sure, you're first born out of the water in which all human life is formed** but you must also have a spiritual birth - The Spirit of God gives new life from above. Can you hear Jesus saying, "I'm not trying to change your body - that comes with your earthly birth - what I'm trying to change is your spiritual self. I don't want you to reform, or be remorseful, or go off on a guilt trip about your "badness" or try to change your physical characteristics. I want you to be born into the Spirit."

This new birth is the creative act of the Holy Spirit moving in our lives, changing our way of thinking differently (the Gr. word metanoia) giving us a new start.

And then he gives Nicodemus a new authority for his life. Nicodemus was a Pharisee - he was "book bound". He was in bondage ~~to the law~~*** and Jesus gave him a wide open authority.

* Yes, ~~you~~ are not only the body but more than the body.

** And you are born from below

*** And so are some of us! "the pride page."

PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES

PLANNING NOTES

1
2
3
4
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TIME SCHEDULE

SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE

executive®

PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES

PLANNING NOTES

Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it goes, but you can see what it does. Just so with the pneuma = the Spirit. You can't see it (it's not a book or a person) you can't tell who it's going to touch — gay person or straight person maybe — but you can see the effect of the spiritual rebirth because you can see the spiritually changed person.

John the Elder says:

1 John 5:1-5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ of God — and everyone who loves Jesus loves the Christ of God. By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep God's commandments. And God's commandments are not burdensome.

Whatever is born of God overcomes the world; & this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith!

Who is it that overcomes the world but the One who believes that Jesus is the begotten of God. It's that simple.

It's always so simple and we steer avoid it because maybe it seems too simple. It can't

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PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES		PLANNING NOTES
	1	
	2	
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SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE

executive®

PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES

PLANNING NOTES

what you do [It isn't what is born from below - what is human what is earthly] It's what you allow the HS to do in ~~you~~ that human person. It's what's born from above.

And possibly that's what Christmas is all about. (2) Except you become as little children (1) Except you be born again / the simple unhampered faith of the child - which accepts so trustingly without having to do or undo that allows miracles to happen all around. The only condition of the new birth is faith in Christ's death for your life - in Christ's resurrection for your ~~rebo~~ renewal - In Christ's presence for your rebirth - because in that new birth we become part of Christ's divine nature + life - ~~God~~ Christ became human so that humans could become ~~God~~ Divine.

As we await the birth of Jesus anew, will you permit the Holy Spirit to touch you so that you will be born again; will you die to yourself and be reborn to the very best of yourself - not because you need to or can change what is born from below - but

PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES		PLANNING NOTES
	1	
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SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE

executive®

PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES

PLANNING NOTES

because God & Christ can give you new birth from above - if you will permit it: And like Jesus giving Nicodemus a new authority - like the wind, the pneuma, you will not be able to explain why or how - but you will see it by the effects you see in your own life. by the changes for good which happen to you when Christ is born in you & you are reborn.

This then is the paradoxy of Christmas: Christ is being reborn year by year - but he's not - there is no physical rebirth - but if we allow it Christ is being reborn - because he's being reborn in us - and we are being reborn in him.

Amen -

We are making ready, O Christ, for thy rebirth and ours. Our hearts are listening for your advent; our minds are hastening footsteps as we run with the shepherds. Our bodies are a cradle awaiting the birth of the child Jesus in us - Our whole being is praise & rejoicing. Unto you be glory, O Word made flesh, in whose peace we are secure, in whose mercy we are forgiven, and in whose love we are redeemed forever and ever. Amen.

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PAGE NO.

PREPARED BY

DATE

ACTION NOTES		PLANNING NOTES
	1	
	2	
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TIME SCHEDULE

SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE

executive®